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A
CELEBRATION
OF
PALESTINIAN
FOOD

FADI
KATTAN

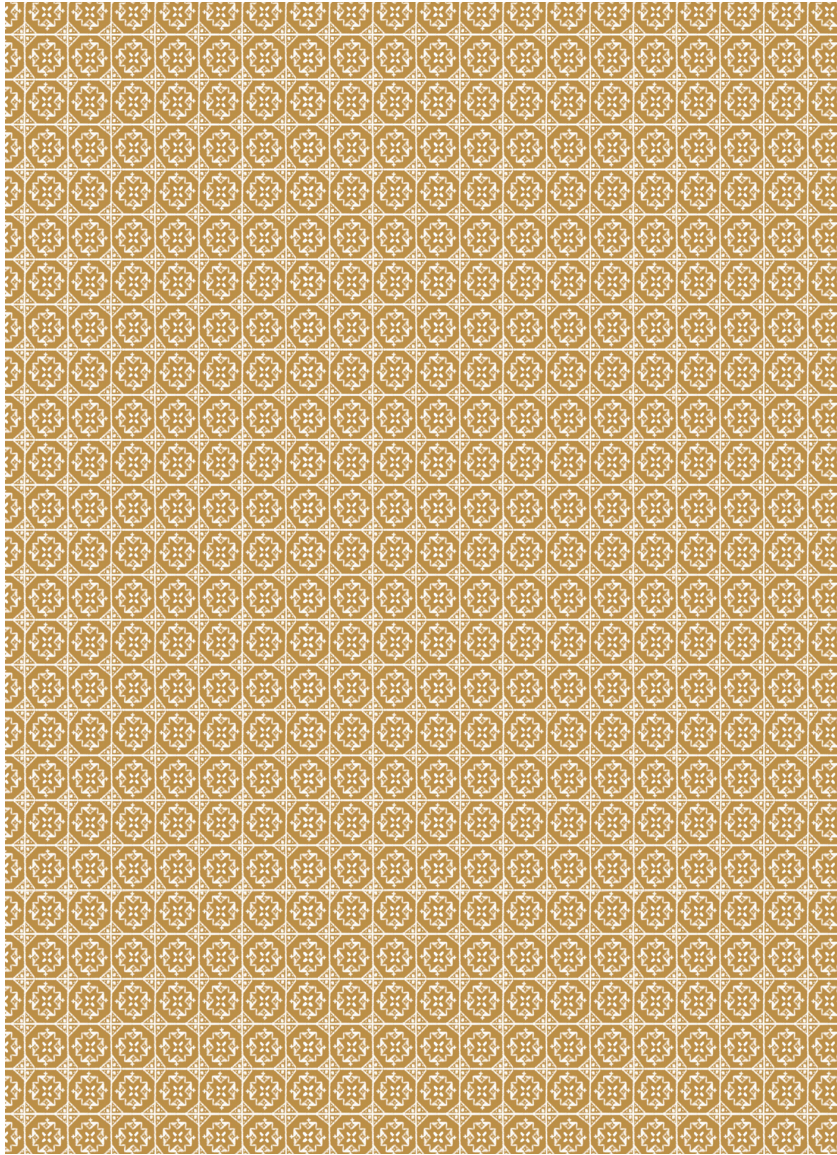
Bethlehem, one of the world's most storied cities, comes alive in this tribute by chef Fadi Kattan. Fadi's family has lived on these lands for generations, and their story is one of resilience, community, and devotion. Food is at the centre of family life, from the daily breakfasts of shakmak bread, rich labaneh, and quince jam, to elaborate Christmas celebrations featuring the spiced wheat porridge burbara, slow-cooked fragrant lamb and rice qidreh, and plenty of Christmas cakes to give and receive. Conjuring the colours and smells of this ancient city, with its bakeries, shops, and butchers, Fadi then takes readers to the surrounding countryside to meet local farmers and artisans; the desert oasis of Jericho, prized for its renowned salt harvested from the Dead Sea; the agricultural hub of Ramat Gan and verdant Artas; the orange groves of Jaffa; the street vendors of Haifa and Sebastia, a tiny hilltop village dating back to the Iron Age where some of the most flavourful olive oil is made.

Accompanying these profiles are over 60 recipes, some passed down through generations, and others of Fadi's improvisation: cheese-stuffed grape leaves, pickled olives, roasted lamb seasoned with fenugreek and cardamom, labaneh with za'atar seeds, braised chard with tahinia, and a fragrant milk pudding.

Fadi holds these stories, foods, people, and places tenderly, and

growing chaos and strife, the legacy of this ancient city end









BETHLEHEM

FADI KATTAN





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I N T R O D U C T I O N

Bethlehem: A city famous the world over, yet so often seen only eyes of the pilgrims passing through. A desire to show the real E and to celebrate it, is what led me to food and hospitality so ma Cooking is how I tell Bethlehem's story.

Each recipe in this book contains memories of people, pla moments in this city, from my childhood to my school years in J my years abroad, and then my return home. Writing this book h me back to memories of how the city has evolved under occupa raising of walls has choked the livelihoods of many, how tourism subjected to ups and downs, how the visitors have come and go made me wonder how many Bethlehemites have returned back with stories

dating back thousands of years ago, carried in every dish, every

cup of coffee.

Deciding to write about my Palestinian cuisine and share it as well as celebrate some of the wonderful artisans of Bethlehem is an extension of a discussion I would have with guests after their visit to my restaurant Fawda in Bethlehem, or at Akub restaurant in London at a conference in Toronto. These conversations encourage my guests to visit Bethlehem to walk the alleyways of the city and meet the people. I encourage others abroad to come to Bethlehem and share in the memories of a land far away.

Yalla! Take my hand and let's roam the stories and flavours of

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B R E A K F A S T S

W I T H B A B A F U A D

At a certain age, you start noticing habits that give you flashbacks to your childhood.

Increasingly these happen to me at breakfast, while I'm enjoying the pleasure of frying eggs for my family or laying out the table. Breakfast with baba, my father, Fuad, was a ritual when I was young and still is today when we spend time together.

As a boy, I was always required to help with breakfast preparation to ensure that the coffee cups, plates, cutlery, and napkins were all set neatly. Then came the tray laden with *zeit o zaatar*—the winning combination of oil and a zaatar spice blend, some addictive thick and sticky *dibs o tahini* (molasses mixed with sesame paste), and the crown jewels, homemade *jamaj* provided by Mama Micheline.

My father would always wake up before everybody else to squeeze lemons and oranges when they were in season and receive a delivery of warm bread—crusty loaves from the Salesian Bakery, round *jamaj* (pitas) from A Bakery, or the wood-fire baked sesame *ka'ek al-quds* (see page 72). He would also take out the small dishes from the fridge that would have been prepared the night before—creamy *labaneh* (strained and seasoned yoghurt) and chunky white Nabulsi cheese, covered in olive oil.

Then Baba would wake us up—probably as much of a tricky task now as it was in my youth. But the smell of eggs—fried or scrambled—a

sometimes grilled bacon and sausages would soon summon me to the kitchen. Sometimes my father would smuggle a few slices of basturma into the house, the highly seasoned, cured Armenian beef that he and we children love so much, but my mother abhors because of its strong fenugreek smell. I remember he would have a friend bring it from an Armenian artisan in the Old City of Jerusalem and would hide it in the fridge until its scent gave its presence away and we would have to gobble it up quickly.

Breakfast, with the family gathering together, was always a start the day. We would sit and chat about our plans, share stories, everything amid the smell of toast and the taste of jam: apricot, Strawberry, or quince—depending on the time of year. My father, a would often travel for work or have long, stressful days, but breakfast must. He swore by it and still does.

When my family discusses food and recipes, Baba is always firm that he is no cook and leaves the expertise of preparing elaborate F dishes to others. I often make fun if he tries to express an opinion on. However, my father may also point out that for years, he was the one at the start of each day, setting me up for whatever the day brought. At the start of each day, the kitchen remains—briefly—his domain.

TABOUN BREAD

1 tablespoon dry baker's
yeast
½ teaspoon sugar
180 ml / ¾ cup warm
water
250 g / 2 cups plus
1 tablespoon all-
purpose flour, plus
more for the work
surface
125 g / 1 cup whole
wheat flour
½ teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon extra-virgin
olive oil

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BETHLEHEM

**MAKES 4 TO 6
BREADS**

Taboun bread is one of the classic Palestinian breads. Taboun is made in a special taboun oven, built with a circular opening at the top to put the bread over stone pebbles. In the past, people would use olive wood and light up the taboun in the morning, so it would be hot. The ashes would be swept around the oven and the inside would be ready for baking.

At my paternal grandparents' home, a taboun was on the balcony or on the terrace. At my maternal grandmother's home, there was a little stone hut outside that held the taboun. I remember the smell of that burnt olive wood; it gave a very particular smoky scent.

However, with time, taboun ovens in the major cities stopped functioning or disappeared, and taboun making was replaced by them with modern technology. The best taboun rotisserie is at Al-Shweiki Bakery. They have a round base of stone that turns around inside a gas oven. I replicate the same process at home: I take a baking sheet, fill it with clean washed pebbles, and preheat it in the oven before I lay down bread on top.

Key to baking the taboun was the tablecloth. The taboun was always covered by an old cotton tablecloth to wrap the taboun in. Taboun bakers would place each fresh hot taboun inside the tablecloth and slowly pile them up until they baked the bread. Covering the bread kept the steam in so the bread stayed soft.

In a small bowl, mix the yeast, the sugar, and a few tablespoons of warm water and leave for 10 to 15 minutes, until it is bubbling.

In a mixing bowl or the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a dough hook, combine the white and whole wheat flours, salt, olive oil, and the yeast mixture. Slowly add the remaining water and mix the dough by hand until the dough gets sticky.

Cover the dough and let rise for 1 hour, or until it doubles in size.

months, it can take a longer time, between 1½ and 2 hours.

Once the dough is ready, press by hand to remove the gas and then divide it into four to six portions.

Flour a work surface, add the portions of the dough, and cover with a cloth to rise for another 30 to 45 minutes, or until the dough has doubled in volume again.

Preheat the oven to 250°C / 475°F. Fill a baking place on the bottom of the oven.

Roll out a portion of the dough on a floured surface, and spread with your flour-dusted fingers 6 inches in diameter. Flip it over while rolling it with your fingers and the dough as needed.

Place the dough on the hot pebbles and bake it until it is coloured on the bottom. Then flip the bread and bake it so until it's coloured. Wrap the first taboun in a hot dish towel.

Return the pebbles to the oven and let heat up for the steps with the dough to make the rest of the



HOUMOUS MUTABAL BIL TAHINIA

400 g / 14 ounces dried
chickpeas, soaked
overnight in water to
cover
1 teaspoon baking soda
2 garlic cloves, crushed
250 g / $\frac{3}{4}$ cup plus 2
tablespoons tahinia
1 teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons ground cumin
Juice of 1 lemon
4 tablespoons extra-virgin
olive oil, plus more to
serve
1 tablespoon almond
slivers
1 teaspoon ground sumac

SERVES 8

This recipe is meant to celebrate the deliciousness of chickpeas. Tahinia is produced from sesame seeds in the factories of Palestine, from Jerusalem to Nablus, where its nutty scent emanates across the historic alleyways.

However, the essence of this dish is the chickpea, not the variations that we are witnessing in the world, where “hummus” seems to have become a type of dip with tahinia.

In Arabic, the word *mutabal* means “seasoned so much more. Mutabal is seasoning with tahinia, fresh herbs, garlic, and spices which ends up being a mixture of all these things.

I call for almond slivers and sumac in the recipe as a very good garnish too.

Drain the chickpeas and combine them in a saucepan with 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ L / 5 cups water. Bring to a boil over high heat and then reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer for 30 minutes, until the chickpeas are tender throughout. While cooking, regularly remove the foam from the surface.

Drain the chickpeas, reserving the cooking water. Reserve 4 tablespoons of the cooking water for decorating the dish and transfer the rest to a mixing bowl. Add the chickpeas to a handheld blender at low speed to crush the chickpeas into a paste. Add 2 garlic cloves and continue blending. Slowly add the tahinia, salt, and lemon juice while blending. Add 4 tablespoons of the reserved cooking water while blending. If the paste is not smooth, you may need to add more water.

Using a large spoon or a spatula, gently fold in 3 tablespoons of the reserved cooking water until you obtain a creamy, silky consistency.

In a small pan, heat the remaining 1 tablespoon of olive oil. Add the almond slivers and fry until lightly coloured, about 2 minutes. Drain on paper towels.

Transfer the houmous to a plate and sprinkle the reserved almonds, and sumac on top. Drizzle with a little olive oil and serve.





EGGS IN SAMNEH WITH SUMAC

1 tablespoon samneh
(ghee)
4 eggs
1 generous pinch of
ground sumac
1 pinch of salt

SERVES 2
SPRING

Perhaps my earliest childhood food memory is in my grandmother Julia's kitchen, watching the bubbling samneh (ghee) and slowly using a spoon to separate the egg whites, while taking care to leave the yolks intact. I then slide the eggs onto a plate and sprinkle with sumac.

I recall anticipating that first dip of the egg whites into the yolks, that first taste of the creamy eggs, and the satisfying crunch of the crispy yolks.

Heat the samneh (ghee) in a pan over medium heat until it is bubbling. Crack the eggs into the pan and leave them to cook until the whites are set, 3 minutes. With a spoon, slowly baste the yolks until they are crispy.

Serve on two plates, sprinkled with sumac and salt.

HWERNEH IN LABANEH

2 bunches mustard greens
1 tablespoon coarse sea
salt, plus more to taste
720 ml / 3 cups labaneh
1 tablespoon extra-virgin
olive oil, to serve
Bread, such as kmaj or
taboun, to serve

SERVES 8

The first *hwerneh* (mustard greens) of the season in Palestine comes from Jericho, an oasis city that is not in the rest of the country and is dotted with natural springs. The greens, macerated and fermented in yoghurt, is full of cream and is an ideal dip for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. I played around with the recipe, replacing the yoghurt with labaneh—strained yoghurt—for deeper flavour.

Strip the leaves from the coarse stems of the mustard and discard the stems. You can leave the thin soft stems. On a chopping board, lay the leaves over the other and chop them to make thin strips. Put them in a colander, add the salt, and rub it into the leaves. Place in a bowl, refrigerate, and allow to drain for at least 6 hours and up to 10 days.

Squeeze the wilted chopped leaves to remove any remaining liquid in a mixing bowl. Add the labaneh and salt to taste. Mix well and store in a glass jar in the fridge for at least 3 days and up to 10 days.

Serve on a plate, drizzled with olive oil. Serve bread along with the dip.







THE QUEEN OF HERBS AND HER ANCIENT VILLAGE

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BETHLEHEM

As a child, I would often go with my grandparents to the picturesque Car village of Artas, which lies in a lush green valley just south of Bethlehem. we would drive across the stone bridge to reach a well-known convent th always enjoyed the stunning view of the land, carefully tended by local f and rich in produce, most famously, grapes and lettuces.

My grandparents liked to visit the sisters of the Convent of the Hc Conclusus (“Enclosed Garden”), and we would picnic amidst the natural l of its grounds. Sometimes we would play under the trees, close to the an Solomon’s Pools. It is said that in Artas, King Solomon wrote the “Song o the biblical text celebrating carnal beauty and love.

For me, as for most Bethlehemites, Artas is synonymous with fine succulent fruits, and crunchy vegetables. I can still recall my delight as a l biting into one of its freshly picked lettuces.

For more than four decades now, Um Nabil, a native of Artas, has walked from her small village into Bethlehem's Old City early every day, except for the rainy season, carrying its riches to our souk. She is there through the chills of winter and the parched, hot days of summer. First, as a young woman, she sold milk and butter that she and her husband produced. Later, after they sold their cows, she began to offer seasonal produce grown by her neighbours or brought to her by farmers and foragers.

Um Nabil, always dressed in a traditional embroidered Palestinian keffiyeh regally in her established spot, on the steps at the entrance of the market.



she displays her fresh herbs and vegetables tantalisingly around her “Queen of Herbs”.

For me, as a young food lover, she had an almost mythical status. When I went to the market taken shopping, I would constantly hear her name referenced, with one person telling another “Get the *silek* (chard) from Um Nabil” or “Um Nabil has the best wild zaatar today”.

Fast forward a few years, to when I moved back to my family home in the Old City and opened my restaurant nearby. It was inevitable that U

her warm smile and encyclopaedic knowledge of Palestinian food, is a fixture of my daily life.

I tend to start my mornings dropping by her stall to chat and mouthwatering produce she has that day. From fragrant zaatar to fennel from finger-length, hot chillies to tender, fresh grape leaves (the regular fare tastes better from her stall than anyone else's. But there is always a little surprise, a foraged delicacy lying in wait for me. So it is *hwerneh* (*Sisymbrium officinale*), or mustard greens. Sometimes loof (*Arum palaestinum*), also known as black calla, Solomon's lily and kardi. Um Nabil teases me when she sees my purchase by asking



are you going to do with it?” Often, a visit to her stall inspires my next day, totally reshaping the ideas that had been forming in my head.

At the same time, my conversations with Um Nabil and the goods on her stall are a reminder of the realities of agriculture in the area. Nowadays, the land of Artas is less and less cultivated. A young generation of Palestinians are leaving farming either for more comfortable jobs in the Palestinian public sector or well-paid construction work in Israel. Um Nabil often discusses the impact of these changes on farming but also the conditions the remaining workers have to go through, leaving home early in the morning, queuing at illegal occupation checkpoints, confronting various arbitrary policies. Knowledge of the land is rapidly being lost. Water is a huge problem. The verdant valley of Artas is drying up as expanding Israeli settlements encroach on nearby hilltops and divert the water that used to flow down naturally and nourish its springs.

Her eyes tear up when she talks about Christian-Muslim relations in Bethlehem, a subject we both have close to heart and are proud of. When she talks about her friends and experiences, she shares stories of Bethlehem; the cooperation between people of different faiths, between people from the city, the West Bank, and the refugee camps. She always finishes that chapter of our discussion with a prayer: “God bless the people! God bless the people of Palestine! May nothing divide us!”

Um Nabil is stoic and the embodiment of what we call in Arabic resilience. She has seen it all: the Palestinian intifadas, or uprisings, triggered by Israeli troops in Bethlehem, the storms, the heat waves, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet she remains a constant presence in the Old City, with her friendly manner and top-quality produce, ready to bring flavour to every meal.

We often discuss recipes and talk about local characters, connecting the present and the past. Um Nabil always has advice for the best way to cook what she sells, and she looks at me doubtfully when I say that I fry the molokhia (*Corchorus olitorius* ; also called Egyptian spinach or jute leaves) in oil. She uses her fresh chamomile in a delicious salad. She is proud of her reputation for being the best in the area.

the excellent produce she sells and of being a stalwart of the history sharing her love for Palestinian food and the land with everyone, who are regular customers, tourists, or simply passersby.

CHEESE- STUFFED GRAPE LEAVES

CHEESE PARCELS

20 fresh grape leaves (or
substitute leaves stored
in a brine)

1 tablespoon raisins

Olive oil, for brushing

150 g / 5¼ ounces Akkawi
or Nabulsi cheese (or
substitute another
fresh brined cheese,
such as halloumi, fresh
Syrian cheese, or queso
blanco)

2 small tomatoes, thinly
sliced

3 tablespoons dried and
crumbled zaatar leaves
(or substitute oregano)

DRESSING

2 tablespoons extra-virgin
olive oil

1 pinch of salt

Leaves of 5 sprigs of fresh

This recipe is inspired by my mother's moreish meat leaves. By substituting Akkawi or Nabulsi cheese for meat makes an easy starter, perfect for vegetarians. Grape leaves are a traditional ingredient in Palestinian cuisine. They are usually rolled with meat and rice, or just rice and herbs, or are wrapped in pappadums. I am always impressed at the speed and expertise of women as they roll the leaves into piles of delicious, golden-brown parcels.

Both Akkawi and Nabulsi are fresh cheeses. The mixture in the grape leaves includes the perennial herb zaatar, which you may know zaatar as a spice blend, but it is also an herb called *Origanum Syriacum*.

To make the parcels, if you're using fresh grape leaves, blanch them in a large pot of lightly salted water until they turn soft to the touch, 5 to 7 minutes, depending on the thickness of the leaves. Drain well.

Put the raisins in a bowl filled with enough warm water to cover them because we need to hydrate them slightly.

Brush ten little ramekins, 5 to 7 cm / 2 to 3 inches in diameter, with olive oil. Place two grape leaves in each one, with the top edge facing out so that when we flip the ramekin, we'll end up with the top edge facing up.

Cut the cheese into ten equal portions. Drain the raisins.

Put one piece of cheese, a slice of tomato, a few raisins, and a pinch of zaatar on the grape leaves. Fold the leaves to enclose the filling.

Preheat the oven to 160°C / 325°F. Place the ramekins in a pan and fill the pan with water to the height of the grape leaves. Cover the top of the ramekins with a baking sheet; we don't want the leaves to dry out.

Bake for 20 minutes. Remove the ramekins from the water and drain.

mint or fresh zaatar,
or other green herb of
choice
2 drops of water (optional)

SERVES 10

When you're ready to serve, flip the ramekins onto plates
stuffed grape leaves.

To make the dressing, combine the olive oil, salt, and herb
process to a homogenous green sauce. Add the water to
needed. Sprinkle it on top of the grape leaves and serve



SPRING

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LAMB SHANKS

1 ball laban jameed, about
250 g / 9 ounces
500 ml / 2 cups water
1 onion, cut in half
2 cinnamon sticks
4 bay leaves
6 cardamom pods
4 lamb shanks, 250 to
300 g / 9 to 10 ounces
each
1 tablespoon extra-virgin
olive oil
3 garlic cloves, crushed,
plus 3 garlic cloves,
SPRING thinly sliced
80 g / 2¾ ounces peeled
(blanched) almonds
80 g / 2¾ ounces
pistachios
80 g / 2¾ ounces pine
nuts

SERVES 4

This recipe is inspired by mansaf, a dish with a sauce of laban jameed, a fermented dried yogurt with rice or wheat bulgur. I have a passion for it, it embodies Palestinian umami. It comes from the desert, where yoghurt is preserved and dried, giving it a beautiful flavour to meats, rice, or vegetables. In many different dishes, often grating it over. Whatever way, it's fabulously delicious.

The night before, reserve about 50 g / 1¾ ounce for plating, and soak the rest in water overnight.

Fill a large pot with the water and add the onion, cardamom, and lamb. Bring to a boil over medium heat and remove any foam that forms on the surface. Simmer for about 2 hours, until the meat is tender but still firm.

Remove the meat from the broth and let rest for 10 minutes. Strain 1 cup of meat broth.

³³ Drain the laban jameed that has been soaking.

In a separate pot, heat 1½ teaspoons of the olive oil. Add the crushed garlic and cook for 30 seconds, until fragrant. Add the laban jameed and 240 ml / 1 cup of the meat broth. Whisk until the laban jameed dissolves into the broth.

In a small pan, heat the remaining 1½ teaspoons of olive oil. Add the sliced garlic and fry until it becomes golden, 2 to 3 minutes.

To serve, divide the lamb shank into four wide bowls, spoon some of the laban jameed sauce on top, then sprinkle on the garlic and garnish with laban jameed over the meat or use a knife to grate it on top.

PICKLED GREEN ALMONDS

1¾ L / 7⅓ cups water
60 g / ½ cup salt
500 g / 18 ounces green
almonds
250 ml / 1 cup white wine
vinegar
2 sprigs rosemary
6 white peppercorns
4 cardamom pods
2 garlic cloves, finely
chopped

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BETHLEHEM

MAKES 1 L / 4¼ CUPS

The beginning of spring in Palestine is a time to celebrate. We do not wait for them to ripen and harden; we pick them while they are still green and tender. They are sold by street vendors for people to munch, dipped in salt. We pick them to preserve their green freshness and we also dry them to eat them or as salted roasted almond snacks.

Mix 1½ L / 6⅓ cups of the water and the salt in a large pot to make the brine. Bring to a boil over medium heat, stirring to dissolve, then remove from the heat.

Wash the almonds under running water. Then pierce the bottom of each almond with a metal skewer, to allow the brine to soak in. Place the almonds into the brine and allow to soak overnight.

In another pot, mix together the remaining 240 ml / 1 cup of water, rosemary, peppercorns, cardamom, and garlic. Bring to a boil over medium heat, remove from the heat, cover, and allow the aromatic liquid to steep overnight.

The next morning, remove the almonds from the brine, rinse them, and place them in sterilized jars.

Bring the vinegar mixture to a boil and pour over the almonds in the jars. Seal the jars well and allow to cool before refrigerating. They can be eaten after one week and will keep, refrigerated, for up to 6 months.





ARAYES

SHRAK

250 g / 9 ounces
ground beef

250 g / 9 ounces
ground lamb

1 onion, finely chopped

1 green chilli, finely
chopped

2 garlic cloves, finely
chopped

20 g / ½ cup finely
chopped fresh flat-leaf
parsley

1 teaspoon salt

½ teaspoon ground
SPRING
allspice

½ teaspoon ground
coriander

½ teaspoon ground cumin

¼ teaspoon ground black
pepper

4 shrak breads (or
substitute lavash,
markook, or any thin
bread)

1 tablespoon extra-virgin
olive oil

1 cube of lamb fat, 20 to
50 g / ¾ to 1¾ oz

The best arayes (stuffed pitas) in Palestine are in Nablus, a bustling food haven in the north. Go to the best baker in the Old City, Al-Wakeel, for the breads, and then head to Bashar Al-Masri for the arayes. He makes the best arayes in town. The butcher in front of you, fills the pita, and bakes it in the oven. Then he takes it out and rubs a piece of lamb fat on the hot arayes and gives them a last browning.

For the full experience, walk a bit further down the street by the Al-Amad pickle shop, and get a variety of dips to enjoy with your arayes.

For this recipe, instead of using a pita, use a shrak bread that can be rolled to make arayes. Eat them with tahinia, or a spicy dip on the side and plenty of mint.

In a bowl, combine the beef, lamb, onion, chilli, coriander, cumin, and pepper and mix by hand.

On a work surface, spread a shrak flat and cut it into 12 pieces. Spread 1 tablespoon of the minced meat on each piece. Repeat with the remaining shrak.

Preheat a gas or charcoal barbecue (grill) to medium-high heat. Brush the grill rack with oil. Cook the arayes and cook for 5 to 6 minutes on each side until the filling is cooked.

Before you remove the arayes from the heat, rub the sides of the arayes and cook for another minute. Remove from the heat and serve.

MAKES 8 ARAYES





BETHLEHEM

BAKERIES

Bread is such an essential part of Palestinian cuisine. We do not just make it into sandwiches, we learn to use it expertly to dip into and scoop up food, such as houmous. It forms the tasty base of favourite dishes, such as mansaf (chicken cooked in a sauce of laban jameed) and musakhan (chicken roasted with sumac and served over taboun bread). And no steaming bowl of lentils or molokhia (*Corchorus olitorius* or jute leaves) is complete without bread—our local version of croutons.

All around Bethlehem, you will still find independent bakeries. In times of crisis or a general strike, these are among the only shops you will routinely find open. Inevitably, there are some that are sought out for the particular bread they supply, but there are also several that I have a special connection to. The variety and distinctive shapes and qualities of their freshly baked loaves, as well as the characters who bake and sell them, are part of the fabric of our everyday life.

The most commonly consumed bread is a circular, leavened, double-layered one that seems to have its origins in the prehistoric flatbreads of the wider region. It is called pita internationally, but in the Palestinian dialect, it is known as *taboun*. This you will find baked fresh each morning all over the city, in the prominent main bakeries and other stores which buy from them. You will see boys balancing long trays of it precariously on their heads, often using a small round crusty bread, sold in packs of ten, is a staple of every Palestinian home.

When I am traveling overseas, after a time, I will always crave Bethlehem bread.

kmaj. Specifically, I long for the Al-Shweiki Bakery on the main road toward the Nativity Church. As a child, I would regularly stop off there in the evening with my aunt Pauline and uncle George whom I often visited after school for help with tricky subjects such as algebra. There was such a delight in being around town with them, munching on a scalding-hot piece of kmaj. For reasons, this loaf still has the perfect measure of slight saltiness. The only downside to Shweiki's kmaj has been that it has ruined forever the possibility of my being able to enjoy any other pita-type bread, wherever it is from.

The Shweiki family also owns a small, older bakery right in the middle of Bethlehem's bustling market, the old souk. This bakery distinguishes it-



by making two traditional types of Palestinian bread, taboun (see p. 38) and shrak. Both are delicious in their own right but are also essential favourite dishes. Now that bread is less routinely made at home, the living nearby and wanting to make mansaf or musakhan are obliged to go to Abu Hussein, the friendly, bald-headed baker who works with Ayman and is constantly shuttling between the shop window and the workshop operating in the shadows behind him.

Taboun is a larger, round, flattish whole wheat bread that is baked in a round, wood-fired clay oven with a cooking surface of stones from the desert. This helps give it a special taste and rougher texture. In fact, a lot of old homes, including mine, have a little shack outside where the taboun used to be. The oven is dug into the wall or built on the floor for the fire and stones. The taboun can only begin once the fire is fully alight and the stones have been charged with heat. Then the ball of dough is flattened and laid down, then flipped to produce the taboun bread. Nowadays, there are many constraints that make this style of home baking less appealing. However, at Al-Shweiki bakery, they have invented a way of safely and efficiently

larger quantities. They have a machine that is gas fuelled, with a rotating bed that goes into the oven to make their excellent loaves.

Taboun is typically larger than a dinner plate and is used as the base of musakhan, one of our Palestinian national dishes, which is often made to celebrate the new olive oil season. The bread is drenched lavishly in olive oil, greenish or golden—with grilled chicken just visible beneath a heap of pomegranate seeds, sumac and onions. Once assembled, the whole dish is heated briefly in the oven before it is topped off with a sprinkling of pine nuts. As soon as it is served, dig in, ripping off pieces of the taboun bread, textured perfectly to absorb the olive oil, so that each mouthful drips with it deliciously.

Shrak is a less filling variety of bread. It is very thin, like a crêpe, but surprisingly strong and versatile, made with a mixture of whole and white flour. It is baked on a hot metal dome called a *saj*, so that the bread is called *saj* or *sajia* (or *tava* in an Indian market). The *saj* is a common sight outside a Palestinian bakery, where you will often see a young man skillfully producing these tray-sized breads. The dough is stretched over a round pillow and then transferred to the top of the *saj*, where it bakes very quickly. It is carefully turned over onto the pillow so that it does not break. The result is a silky, and malleable bread.

One of my favourite fast snacks is a shrak sandwich, the bread loaded up with labaneh (strained and seasoned yoghurt) and zaatar, then rolled up into a thin, long sandwich. Shrak can also be used to serve shawarma or grilled meats. Then there are traditional dishes that are built around it, such as fatteh, made with layers of bread, meat, eggplant, or houmous all buried under a generous portion of garlic yoghurt and topped with pieces of fried bread. For many, the dish is piled with the boiled lamb meat and rice coated in steaming, thick, salty labaneh (see page 33) onto a shrak, then sprinkle roasted sliced almonds on the top. The dish can then be eaten efficiently in a Bedouin style with your fingers, or a mouthwatering ball of rice and meat held in a small piece of shrak.

Closer to home, the Salesian Bakery is laden with special significance. It is run by the Salesian Convent and Church, which have a large compound

entrance of the Old City of Bethlehem. The Salesian congregation is a Catholic order with a mission to help the young and the poor, with education in particular. In Bethlehem, in the late nineteenth century, it opened an orphanage followed by the Salesian Technical School, which went on to provide vocational training in crafts such as carpentry, blacksmithing, and other crafts. My family were evidently delighted customers as many treasured pieces of furniture in our home were made by the school's artisans, including the dining table. At breakfast time, that table was usually graced with a selection of breads from the Salesian Bakery.

The Salesian Bakery makes white loaves that are not traditional but have become well-known in Bethlehem. One of its favourite innovations is a bread popularly known as *hamam* —or dove—which is crusty and round. There is also a long baguette-type shape and the shorter roll version. This can easily be cut up and made into sandwiches but I love to grill it into labaneh. There is also a small, round zaatar bread, flavoured with zaatar leaves. The bakery opens very early each day and often closes late. There is a constant stream of people rushing into the bakery to carry off fresh, warm loaves.

It is not just the taste of the bread from the Salesian Bakery that we appreciate, it is the philosophy of their convent and church, too, which flows through the businesses and institutions which they establish. They live in a community in a respectful and humble way, distributing bread to neighbours regardless of their religion, origins, or back stories. For me it represents the essence of solidarity and community responsibility.

My final favourite bakery is a small place called Abu Fuad, which makes *ka'ek al-quds* (see page 72), the sesame seed-coated bread that so many people love in Jerusalem but which is also made in every Palestinian town. At Abu Fuad is an impressively large wood-fired oven used to cook the loops of dough. It is mesmerising to watch the baker expertly use his long-handled wooden peel to slide out the baked loaves. The smell is heavenly, and that queuing for your hot loaves is never tiresome.

What I especially like about Abu Fuad is that they also bake *ka'ek* in the wood fire, giving them a yellow colour when you peel off the sesame seeds and a delicious, smoky taste. They also offer a large, chewy kind of falafel served with a particularly salty zaatar which makes for an excellent accompaniment.

I love to collect the bread for weekend breakfasts with my family. When I am feeling too lazy to make it to the *ka'ek* oven, there is always another option. All around Bethlehem, you will hear the *ka'ek* sellers—local vendors who sell the bread, eggs, falafel, and zaatar from small wooden carts that they push around the busy streets. Their cries of “*ka'ek, ka'ek*” always seem to

rumbling, convincing me of a hitherto unacknowledged need for the bread. Once they have my attention, each ka'ek seller has a gift of persuasion to buy more bread than I had ever guessed that I needed.

MUJADARA

280 g / 10 ounces green
lentils
½ teaspoon salt
125 ml / ½ cup extra-
virgin olive oil
4 red onions, halved and
thinly sliced
Salt
1 teaspoon sugar
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon ground
coriander
1 teaspoon ground
cinnamon
350 g / 1¾ cups medium-
grain rice
44 600 ml / 2½ cups hot
water

DRESSING

2 spring onions (scallions,
chopped)
Juice of 2 lemons
1 teaspoon ground sumac
1 teaspoon extra-virgin
olive oil

SERVES 4

When I close my eyes and try to think of a dish that appears, Mujadara is one of them. At the beginning when I started my radio show, *Sabah Al-Yasma*, Chef, the recipe most requested by people locked across the world was mujadara, a humble but satisfying dish.

It is worth noting that there are probably as many mujadara as there are Palestinians.

Soak the lentils in water to cover for 30 minutes. Drain and discard soaking water.

In a pot, combine the lentils, salt, and 750 ml / 3¼ cups water. Bring to a medium heat until the lentils are al dente, 10 to 12 minutes. Drain and rinse the lentils with cold water to stop the cooking, then set aside.

Pour 60 ml / ¼ cup of the olive oil into a medium-size frying pan. Heat on medium heat. Add the onions and sprinkle with a pinch of salt and cook over low heat for 3 to 4 minutes, until translucent. Add 1 teaspoon sugar on the onions and cook for 6 to 8 more minutes, until caramelised.

Drain half the onions on paper towels and leave the other half in the oil.

In a large pot, heat the remaining 60 ml / ¼ cup of olive oil on high heat. Stir in the cumin, coriander, cinnamon, and ½ teaspoon salt. Stir well until the spices release their fragrance, about 2 minutes. Stir well to coat with the spices, then pour in the hot water and decrease the heat to medium. Cook for 4 to 5 minutes and stir well. Continue to cook until the lentils and rice are al dente with a slight crunch—almost done, about 12 minutes.

Pour the reserved onions and oil into the pot, stir well to combine with the lentils, and leave on low heat until the water reduces and keep the pot covered for 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, to make the dressing, combine the spring onions, lemon juice, sumac, and remaining 1 teaspoon of olive oil. Transfer the

serving bowl and fluff with a fork. Sprinkle the dressing c
the reserved caramelised onions and serve.



SPRING

45



SAYADIEH SAMAK

2 kg / 4½ pounds whole
sea bass
2 teaspoons salt
Juice of 1 lemon
500 ml / 2 cups vegetable
oil, for frying
1 cinnamon stick
3 bay leaves
5 cardamom pods
4 onions, halved and thinly
sliced
2 tablespoons all-purpose
flour
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon ground allspice
½ teaspoon ground
turmeric
½ teaspoon ground
nutmeg
600 g / 3 cups long-grain
rice
75 ml / 5 tablespoons
extra-virgin olive oil
50 g / ⅓ cup almond
slivers
50 g / ⅓ cup pine nuts

SERVES 6

Sayadieh evokes memories of the beaches
homes of my relatives. Or, before the bloc
at one of the Gaza restaurants. It also evol
in Jaffa and my cooking series, *Teta's*
memorable episode, I prepared sayadieh,
Nadia Chacar, a Palestinian from Jaffa, wh
send a fish to me in Bethlehem. We cooke
as I was not able to visit her. I like to think
Palestinian equivalent of makloubeh, a lay
Despite the differences between the two,

Fillet the sea bass and reserve the bones and h

Marinate the fillets in 1 teaspoon of the salt an

Fill a pan for deep-frying with 200 ml / ¾ cup
over high heat to 180°C / 350°F. Add the fish b
they're brown on both sides, about 10 minutes
with a slotted spoon and drain on paper towel

Fill a pot with 1 L / 4½ cups water. Add the ci
cardamom pods, remaining 1 teaspoon salt, an
Bring to a boil over high heat. Decrease the he
20 minutes, until the broth is flavorful.

In the same pan used for frying the fish bones,
350° F. Add the onions and fry until they're ca
While they're cooking, sprinkle with a pinch of

Strain the broth and discard the bones and the

In a bowl, mix the flour, cumin, allspice, turme
sides of each fillet in the flour mixture.

Heat the remaining 300 ml / 1¼ cups vegetab
high heat to 180°C / 350°F. Add the fillets in b
until they're cooked through and golden, abou

Rinse and drain the rice.

In a large pot, layer the onions, the fish, and the cover the pot with the lid. Cook over high heat decrease the heat and leave it to cook until the tender, about 25 minutes.

Meanwhile, in a small frying pan, heat the olive the almonds for 3 minutes. Add the pine nuts : minute more. Set aside on paper towels.

When the rice is done, remove the lid and flip . You'll end up with layers of fried fish and carrot almonds and pine nuts on top and serve.

SLOW- ROASTED LAMB

2 teaspoons cardamom pods
1½ teaspoons fenugreek seeds
1½ teaspoons allspice berries
2 teaspoons coarse sea salt, plus more as needed
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
2¼ kg / 4½ pounds whole bone-in leg of lamb
1 garlic bulb, halved
2 onions, quartered
500 ml / 2⅛ cups lamb stock (or substitute chicken stock)

SERVES 4 TO 6

Lamb is the meat you cook in Palestine to honour a feasts of mansaf to the roasted stuffed lambs in the Samaritans, lamb is always the pièce de résistance of a celebration table.

Fenugreek is widely used in Palestine in a dessert of semolina called hilbeh, and rarely in a savoury recipe, fenugreek, cardamom, and allspice lend the delicious fragrance.

Preheat the oven to 220°C / 425°F.

Slightly crush the cardamom pods with the blunt end of a mortar and pestle. Add the fenugreek, allspice, salt, and olive oil and rub over the leg of lamb.

Transfer the lamb to a roasting pan and roast for 20 minutes. Remove the pan from the oven and decrease the heat to 200°C / 400°F.

Add the garlic, onions, and lamb stock to the roasting pan. Pour the liquid over the lamb, add some hot water to the pan first with parchment paper, then aluminum foil.

Cook for 3½ hours. Check the liquid, add more hot water if needed. Return the pan to the oven for another 2½ hours. The lamb should be tender. Uncover and roast for 20 minutes more to brown.

Remove the lamb from the oven, cover with parchment paper, and let rest for 20 minutes.

Transfer the lamb to a cutting board. Pass the pan juices through a fine sieve into a small saucepan, discarding the solids. Simmer over medium heat to reduce to a thick sauce, around 15 minutes. Add salt if needed. Serve the lamb with a spoonful of the sauce.



SPRING

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J E R I C H O

Jericho is a small town a few miles from the Dead Sea, the lowest point on Earth. It's an oasis with water-rich canals that run through the city. Tiny canals, which I grew up playing in, transport water to properties across Jericho. The canals irrigate the orange plantations and other farms. On the outskirts of the city, you can see the palm plantations; they require less water. The available water from the springs allows different herbs to grow all over the area during spring and summer.

Jericho is usually a winter vacation destination for people from the West Bank. The weather is mild and warm, a nice change away from higher areas which are usually much colder in winter. When I was a child, there wasn't much construction as there is today. Nowadays people build villas around Jericho as winter vacation homes or to be rented out for a couple of days. My grandparents would often spend time in Jericho, and we would join them on Sundays, which is always reserved for family. We would play in the garden surrounding the rented house, and go down the valley to pick herbs or to a nearby orange grove to pick fruit.

There are many herbs that grow in Jericho. In my memory I link Jericho with *hwerneh*, mustard greens, a very sharp-tasting herb. We would pick branches of *hwerneh* from fields that are close by. We'd chop it, add yoghurt, and let it sit for a while to use as a dip (see page 22). The Arab Development Project was established by friends of my grandparents, and it was the first industrial Palestinian farm mainly financed by dairy operations, including the making of yoghurt and labneh (strained and seasoned yoghurt). We would make sure to buy their dairy products and store them in glass jars to enjoy throughout the season.

The other herb that reminds me of Jericho and grows in fields is *Corchorus olitorius*, also called Egyptian spinach or jute mallow. Another herb, it has a viscous texture, similar to cooked okra, and there is a whole lot of it.

around how viscous it should be. As with every other ingredient in each area in Palestine—and sometimes in each family—people prepare it differently. Some make a stew with it that has either meat or chicken and always garlic and coriander. Some people add a tomato to reduce the viscosity, while others cook it for longer to increase the viscosity. Some prefer to finely chop molokhia while others use the whole leaves. In Jericho markets there are usually whole molokhia branches for sale as people dry it for winter and enjoy it at any time of the year.

Jericho is an arid area in the middle of the desert, and yet it's blooming greenery. In Jericho, fields are filled with growing green leeks, khobeizeh (*Althaea officinalis* or marshmallow), to be sautéed in oil, and sumac. Sumac is often used with sautéed herbs as it adds a tangy flavour. Silek (chard) is also found in these fields.

The fields are watered with groundwater from springs. One called Ein ad Duyuk. It has a pool, and we would sometimes go there to swim, and later, a barbecue with dishes made from produce from Jericho fields prepared by my grandmother or her friends. Al-Auja is another place in the north of Jericho, an impressive place, with waterfalls running down a mountain. We would often go there to admire those waterfalls in the desert, and much later, when filming *Teta's Kitchen*, I spent time with a Bedouin community that live in the area, where we cooked a fabulous meal.

Historically, the agriculture around Jericho centered around date farms, which produce the best dates. The area is also known for small bananas known as *abu namla*, which translates to "the father of speckles" because they have black speckles on the yellow skin.

It has been sad going back to visit this area as the Bedouin population has been forced out by the Israeli occupation and cloistered into limited areas. Water is being diverted to Israeli settlements in the area.

The tangible impact of colonialism on that part of the West Bank is evident in the effects it has had on Palestinian agriculture, access to land and sources of water, and restrictions on foraging.



EASTER KNAFEH NESTS

SYRUP

200 g / 1 cup white sugar

240 ml / 1 cup water

1½ teaspoons fresh lemon
juice

A few drops of orange
blossom water

NESTS

115 g / ½ cup unsalted
butter, melted

250 g / 9 ounces knafeh
dough

CHOCOLATE

GANACHE

150 g / ⅔ cup heavy cream

150 g / 5¼ ounces 70%
dark chocolate

5 small sugar-coated
chocolate Easter eggs
or fresh rose petals

MAKES 12 NESTS

Knafeh, shredded filo dough, is incredibly different shapes to produce both sweet and salty dough, sometimes sold as kadaïf or kataif. In Nablus and is often stuffed with salty Nablus cheese made in Bethlehem with a twist. There, it is steamed and served with cinnamon, walnuts rather than salty cheese. I think the similarity to the fine twigs of a nest works beautifully. It is very simple to make, extremely tasty, and loved by chocolate lovers from children to adults.

To make the syrup, in a saucepan, combine the ingredients, heat, stirring until the sugar dissolves and the syrup coats a spoon, about 5 minutes. Add orange blossom water. Set aside.

Preheat the oven to 180°C / 350°F.

To make the nests, brush some of the melted butter on a muffin pan.

In a bowl, combine the knafeh dough and the melted butter. Gently try to avoid breaking the knafeh too much. Flatten the dough and brush it on both sides with the melted butter. Press the dough to the muffin pan, covering the bottom layer; it should be about 2½ cm / 1 inch high. When the dough is compacted.

Bake for 12 to 14 minutes, until the dough turns golden brown.

To make the ganache, heat the cream in a saucepan until hot but not boiling. Break the chocolate into pieces with a wooden spoon. Decrease the heat to low and melt; it will take a few minutes. The texture will be smooth but keep it on the heat and stir until it becomes a thick ganache. Remove from the stove and leave to cool.

To assemble the nests, gently flip over the pan
them on a tray ready to go into the refrigerator
parchment paper. Drizzle a bit of the syrup on
the chocolate ganache. Break the small chocol
top. You could also sprinkle fresh rose petals

SIYAMI- STUFFED GRAPE LEAVES AND COURGETTES

400 g / 2 cups medium-
grain rice, rinsed and
drained

2 small onions, finely
chopped

5 garlic cloves, finely
chopped

1/2 bunch flat-leaf parsley,
leaves only, finely
chopped

1/2 bunch mint leaves,
finely chopped

1 small green chilli, finely
chopped

1 kg / 2 1/4 pounds
tomatoes

2 teaspoons ground
allspice

1/2 teaspoon ground black
pepper

1/4 teaspoon ground

Siyam is the Arabic word for “fasting.” The Pale marked by many days of fasting. Palestinians of during daylight hours during the month of Rama Christians refrain from eating animal products o and Fridays, depending on their denomination. I leading up to Easter, requires fasting of all Chris Although the cuisine is not religious, it is often a religious traditions.

I find it a strong symbol of diversity and b Palestinians to see Muslims and Christians gathe preparing the foods used for different religious c

Stuffed courgettes (zucchini) and rolled g delicacies that can be made vegetarian to suit a Personally I prefer serving the siyami version of and courgettes cold or at room temperature and piping hot.

In a large bowl, combine the rice, onions, garlic, parsle Finely chop 3 of the tomatoes and add to the rice. Ad pepper, cardamom, cumin, cinnamon, ginger, cloves, a add 1 tablespoon of salt and 5 tablespoons of olive oil

Mix well to coat the rice and vegetables with the oil a

If the grape leaves are fresh, cut off the hard stalks an in a large pot of boiling water until tender but firm, at the grape leaves are stored in a jar, drain them and rin water to reduce the acidity and saltiness. Set aside a f bottom of the pot.

Slice the remaining tomatoes.

To core the courgettes, cut off the tops, slice lengthwi or spoon, empty the courgettes until the outside is ab thick. (Store the cored insides to use in another recipe.

cardamom
1/4 teaspoon ground cumin
1/4 teaspoon ground
cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon ground ginger
1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
1/4 teaspoon ground
nutmeg

with courgettes and zaatar or the recipe for Mafghous

Rinse the cored courgettes in a bowl of salted cold water (1 quart of water, use 1 tablespoon of fine table salt). Place them side downwards, to allow the excess water to drain.

Start filling the courgettes with the rice stuffing, but leave about 1 cm / 3/8 inch empty as the rice will expand during cooking.

Cover the bottom of a Dutch oven with a dash of olive oil, leaves, and the sliced tomatoes. Layer the courgettes in



SPRING

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Salt
Olive oil
500 g / 18 ounces grape
leaves (fresh or in a jar
in brine)
1 kg / 2¼ pounds koussa
(small Palestinian

To stuff the rest of the grape leaves, place a le
place approximately 1 teaspoon of the rice stu
Fold the sides in and roll tightly. Arrange the s
courgettes in the pan.

In a bowl, mix 1 L/ 4¼ cups boiling water, the
oil, and 1 teaspoon salt. Pour the mix in the po

zucchini)
Juice of 2 lemons

SERVES 8

grape leaves. Place a small plate on top to keep them flat. Cover the pot with a lid, bring to a boil over high heat to medium and leave to simmer for 50 minutes. Add 1 cup of water at the bottom of the pot. If needed, add a little more water. Taste one stuffed grape leaf and taste to make sure it is not too salty (I intend to be told off at the picnic!). Once everything is cooked, turn off the heat and carefully tilt the pot sideways to drain the excess liquid. Remove the lid and leave covered until it has fully cooled.

To serve, carefully flip over onto a large tray.

MAFGHOUSSA

Extra-virgin olive oil
4 garlic cloves, crushed
1 fresh red chilli, thinly
sliced
500 g / 18 ounces
courgette interiors (see
page 56) or chopped
entire courgettes
1 teaspoon salt
Juice of 1 lemon
30 g / ¼ cup pine nuts
30 g / ½ cup coarsely
chopped mint and
parsley leaves
Warm bread, to serve

58

BETHLEHEM

SERVES 6

Mafghoussa means “squashed” in Arabic, and vegetables are squashed into cold salads once they are different versions of mafghoussa: some are n and laban jameed (salted and dried yoghurt), some olive oil, as I have done here.

The beauty of mafghoussa is that it’s a zero-waste recipe. You can use the cored insides of the courgettes (zucchini) as courgettes; the taste is slightly different, but it’s still delicious. I make mafghoussa when I core courgettes to make Grape Leaves and Courgettes (page 56).

Mafghoussa is always served cold. This recipe is beautiful with grilled meats on the side or by itself.

In a large frying pan, heat 3 tablespoons of the olive oil over medium heat. Add the garlic and sauté until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add the chilli with its seeds to the garlic and sauté for 2 to 3 minutes until the chilli are softened and lightly coloured. Add the courgette interiors, salt and the lemon juice and mix well. Transfer the mafghoussa to a large bowl and leave it to cool down.

In the meantime, in a small pan, toast the pine nuts in medium heat until lightly coloured and fragrant, about 5 minutes.

When the mafghoussa has cooled down, sprinkle the pine nuts on top and drizzle another teaspoon of olive oil. Serve with warm bread for scooping.



SPRING

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BAKED AUBERGINES

TOMATO SAUCE

Olive oil
1 onion, finely chopped
2 garlic cloves, crushed
½ teaspoon coriander seeds
½ teaspoon ground cumin
200 g / 7 ounces ripe tomatoes, coarsely chopped
2 teaspoons tomato paste
150 ml / ⅔ cup water
Salt and pepper

AUBERGINES

3 large aubergines (eggplants)
Olive oil
2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
½ bunch flat-leaf parsley, leaves only, chopped
½ bunch fresh coriander (cilantro), chopped
200 g / 7 ounces ripe tomatoes, finely diced
Juice of ½ lemon
1 teaspoon dried red pepper flakes

The best aubergines (eggplants) in Palestine come from the village of Battir to the west of Bethlehem. In all recipes: traditional stuffed aubergine moussaka, baked aubergines; or simply fried for a breakfast table. The sweet softness of baba ghanoush as a vegetarian course or as an accompaniment.

To make the tomato sauce, heat 1 tablespoon olive oil over medium-high heat, add the onion, and sauté for 5 minutes. Add garlic, coriander seeds, cumin, and chopped tomatoes with tomato paste and water. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Heat to medium and leave to cook for about 20 minutes.

To make the aubergines, preheat the oven to 200°C / 400°F. Place the aubergines on a baking sheet and roast until completely soft.

In a small pan, heat 1 tablespoon olive oil over medium heat. Fry the onion slivers and fry until they're golden on both sides.

When the aubergines are done, slice them lengthwise. Scoop out the flesh carefully, making sure not to scoop out the skin. Mash the aubergine with a fork. Add the tomato sauce and combine well. Mix in the parsley.

In a separate bowl, combine the coriander and onion together.

In another bowl, combine 1 teaspoon olive oil, 1 teaspoon red pepper flakes and mix together.

To assemble the dish, place the aubergine skin on a baking sheet. Spread the mixture of aubergine flesh and tomato sauce on the skin. Sprinkle the mixture and red pepper flake garnish. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Drizzle with olive oil, if you like, and serve.

SERVES 4

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**S
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APRICOT BAKLAWA

200 g / 7 tablespoons
water
1½ teaspoons ground
mastic
200 g / 1 cup sugar
500 g / 18 ounces apricots,
halved and pitted
300 g / 10 ounces unsalted
butter, melted
500 g / 18 ounces frozen
filo sheets, thawed
300 g / 10 ounces shelled
pistachios, crushed in a
mortar

64

BETHLEHEM

SYRUP

100 g / 7 tablespoons
honey
½ teaspoon rose water
Juice of ½ lemon

SERVES 8

Apricots have the shortest peak season of any fruit i are a few weeks of frenzy where we rush to get Mist said to be the best apricots, from a town next to Bet Jala. The fruit has that hint of Arabic mastic sweetn As I write this recipe, my mother is cooking batches the year ahead. People preorder quantities from the farmers that have been working for years will just be guesstimate quantities they will produce and allocat a specific quantity. And then we all try to negotiate l

The best way to eat these apricots is as is—ju wash. I like them very cold, so I put them in a bow cubes. This recipe makes a beautifully fragrant, slig

In a medium-size pot, combine the water, mastic, and 10C sugar and bring to a boil. Decrease the heat to a simmer, and poach for 10 minutes, until they're tender but not sq apricots, reserving the cooking liquid.

Put half the drained apricots into a bowl and mash them consistency of a compote. Reserve the remaining apricot:

To assemble the baklava, brush a 24 by 36 cm / 9 by 13-i butter and line it with parchment paper. Butter the parch

It's very important to keep the filo sheets moist as you w best way to do so is to keep them covered with plastic w on top. Make sure the wet cloth doesn't touch the filo sh sheets, one at a time, and brush one side with butter and Stack 8 buttered filo sheets, then spread a bit of the apri with some of the pistachios. Repeat the process and arra apricots and pistachios on top of the filo. Finish with a fir buttered filo sheets. With a sharp knife, slice the baklava directions to create diamond shapes.

Preheat the oven to 180°C / 350°F.

Bake the baklava for about 40 minutes, until golden and rack.

To make the syrup, mix the honey, the remaining 100 g / reserved apricot cooking liquid, and the rose water in a saucepan. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Decrease the heat and simmer until the syrup coats a dipped spoon. Add the lemon juice and stir. Turn it off the heat, and allow it to cool.

An hour before serving, drizzle the syrup all over the baklava. Allow the flavors to mix together.







SUNDAY

AFTERNOONS

WITH SIDO

MICHEL



Sunday afternoons growing up were full of tasty meals cooked by my grandmother, Teta Julia, followed by seasonal fresh fruit. In Palestine you can range from prickly pears with their neon flesh to giant juicy orange football-size watermelons.

After the meal it was then the habit of my grandfather, Sido, to pull out his sun chair and sit on the balcony at the back of his house, overlooking the well-tended garden and read. From an early age, as his oldest grandson, I was invited to join him, browsing through French magazines or new cookbooks, sometimes one of my grandmother's cookbooks. Then my grandfather would tell me stories of his life.

Sido Michel grew up in France and trained as a doctor in Beirut, coming back to Bethlehem, his ancestral home, to practise. He worked in health centres and clinics across our city, in its refugee camps and surroundings as well as in neighbouring Jerusalem. For many years, he was director of the Holy Family Hospital, then a general hospital. Later he established a private practice and worked as a consultant with patients coming to see him from all over the region. Very often they would bring him gifts of food. I remember sampling the finest crunchy apples from the southern West Bank; halawa (elsewhere known as halva), the sweet tahinia-based treat from Nablus; golden baladi (local) and creamy laban jameed from local Bedouin families.

There is no doubt that my grandfather loved Palestinian cuisine, but he also had a soft spot for the flavours of his childhood in Paris. He poured his heart into his memories and, of course, in time I learned like him to savour the joy of a fluffy croissant and a packed charcuterie board. Sometimes we would spend our holidays in France together, where he would introduce me to the delights of French cuisine to his heart. I would delight in these mouthwatering adventures, and when we were back home I would start planning our next trip and what and how we would eat. Sometimes the results could be quite unexpected.

On one vacation by the sea, my parents, grandparents, and aunts and friends gathered in a restaurant for lunch. I was about ten years old.

was another child who was seated with me at the end of the table. As we chatted away, nobody paid attention to our orders. Imagine their surprise when we were served the largest platter of *fruits de mer* (seafood) we were up to the challenge, we happily spent the afternoon munching on a pile of oysters, clams, mussels, lobster, and langoustines. My grandfather would recount this story and laugh at how daring my palate could be.

Another favourite family tale dates back to when I was about 10 years old. My glands had become worryingly swollen, and I was sent to a specialist examination, though even that doctor was at a loss to explain it. At home,

grandfather asked if I had been tested for toxoplasmosis, only for the doctor to respond that this was unlikely as I had not been close to cats and that I was too young to be eating raw meat, the two main sources of this parasitic infection. Chuckling, my grandfather requested the toxoplasmosis test which, of course, turned out to be positive. This stunned the specialist until my grandfather explained to him that at this tender age, I had already been demanding steak tartare.

Sometimes Sido would lead me down the path of overindulgence. On one wonderful occasion, the two of us went off shopping in Paris, claiming we were just planning to buy a couple of goodies. Instead we returned from the charcuterie with every local delicacy imaginable, from *tête de veau* to thick slices of *jambon* (ham) and rich, buttery foie gras. It is his legacies that also left me with passions for bread and cheese—two staples that combine the beauty of his Palestinian and French identities.

Sido would always be outraged if any meal was served without bread at the table, even if the main course was a carbohydrate, such as pasta or rice. Cheese was another must. Whenever one of us travelled to France, we returned in returning with a selection of French cheeses to share. In Palestine, the everyday cheese offerings were more limited to the supermarket's Gouda or a Nabulsi, but this would not hold us back. From Sido Michel, I have acquired the habit of eating cheese as a midnight snack. If I wake up in the middle of the night, I naturally head to the fridge. My grandmother would often wake up to find the contents of her dairy drawer had been devoured.

While he may have been a great *bon vivant*, Sido was above all a person. He always made it clear to me that being a doctor involved not only treating patients' physical complaints, but also listening to them and learning from their habits. He was a truly gentle man who became expert at recognising similarities in all of us.

Many of the patients became his friends, and he liked to visit them. Sometimes on those Sunday afternoons, before our reading sessions, Sido would take Teta Julia and I on such an excursion, and food would always feature. We might go to see farmers in their citrus groves in Jericho, stop off at the h

farms of Al-Ubeidiya, or visit the grape molasses shops in Halhul or al-Kl

My grandfather continued working in his clinic until the afternoon he died. Now, many years after his passing, I still meet people who remember him, his small kindnesses, and his dedication to the community. Some of former patients recall his love of local products, too. All in all, Sido Mich is an impressive example that I try to emulate at the same time that I try to keep traditions and rituals. I love to read on a Sunday afternoon, and I have to admit that I've given up the habit of midnight raids on the fridge.



KA'EK AL-QUDS AND EGGS

400 g / 3½ cups all-
purpose flour, plus
more for the work
surface
60 g / ¼ cup powdered
whole milk
1 teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon baking soda
1 teaspoon instant yeast
2 tablespoons extra-virgin
olive oil, plus more for
shaping
120 ml / ½ cup warm
water
3 tablespoons water
1 egg white
40 g / 4½ tablespoons
toasted sesame seeds
8 eggs
1 tablespoon zaatar spice
blend

SERVES 4

A morning visit to Jerusalem is never complete without ka'ek, two oven-baked eggs, and a small bunched-up zaatar.

The sesame seed-coated bread is baked fresh in ovens in bakeries across Palestine every morning, then sold from small wooden carts across the streets. Vendors call out with a musical variety of intonations.

An ideal sandwich bread, ka'ek tastes best with labneh, eggs and a pinch of extra-salty zaatar. It is also delicious with (page 220), labaneh (strained and seasoned yoghurt), or anything else that crosses your mind or inspires you.

To make the ka'eks, in a large bowl, whisk together the flour, salt, baking soda, and yeast. Make a well in the middle and pour in the olive oil and the warm water. Mix well by hand until a homogenous dough. Transfer the dough to a floured work surface and let the dough for 10 minutes. Cover with a cloth and leave in for 1 hour.

Flour the work surface, place the dough on the surface, and divide into pieces.

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. With oiled hands, take one piece of dough at a time, form the dough into a ring, and roll it into the oblong shape of the Jerusalem ka'ek. Place the ka'ek on the baking sheet. Repeat with the remaining pieces of dough. Cover with a cloth and leave to rise for 15 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 200°C / 400°F.

Whisk 2 tablespoons of the water and egg white together. Brush the tops of the dough. Mix the sesame seeds with the remaining water, and sprinkle evenly onto the ka'ek.

Bake for 25 minutes, or until the breads are golden. You can remove the baking sheet to get an even colour.

Once the breads are baked, decrease the oven temperature.

To make the eggs, place them in a muffin pan, one whole for 30 minutes.

To serve, slice each ka'ek open as for a sandwich. Peel the egg with a fork in a bowl, add the zaatar and remaining 1 tablespoon of oil mix to combine. Stuff the ka'eks with the egg mixture and





MANAKISH WITH FRESH AND DRIED TOMATOES, PARSLEY CREAM, AND OLIVE OIL

DOUGH

1½ teaspoons dry baking
yeast
120 ml / ½ cup warm water
130 g / 1 cup plus
1 tablespoon all-purpose
flour, plus more for the
work surface
1½ teaspoons sugar
5½ teaspoons extra-virgin
olive oil
½ teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon ground sumac

TOPPINGS

8 sun-dried tomatoes in oil
½ bunch flat-leaf parsley,

Manakish are fluffy, crispy flatbreads that
around Palestine and neighbouring count
with zaatar spice mix, they can be made v
for breakfast or a snack.

The best manakish are the ones bal
burning oven, with the toppings ranging
mincemeat, taken hot in a paper wrap, an
hubbub of the souk.

To make the dough, in a small bowl, dissolve tl
Leave for 4 to 5 minutes, until it starts to bubl

In a large bowl, mix the flour, sugar, and yeast
15 minutes. Mix in 5 teaspoons of the olive oil

Flour a work surface. Turn the dough onto the
dough with your hands for 5 minutes until hon
and allow to rise in a warm place for 30 minut

Preheat the oven to 180°C / 350°F. Line a baki

On a floured surface, divide the dough into fo
into a round circle using either a rolling pin or
and the remaining ½ teaspoon olive oil, and b
breads. Place the flatbreads on the prepared

Place the sheet on the bottom rack of the oven
until the dough is golden.

To prepare the toppings, drain the oil from the
the oil. Coarsely chop the dried tomatoes.

In a bowl, mix the parsley with the crème fraic

Spread the parsley cream over the baked man:
sliced tomatoes and the chopped dried tomat
over the tops.

leaves only, finely
chopped
3 tablespoons crème
fraîche
½ teaspoon salt
2 fresh tomatoes, thinly
sliced

SERVES 4

GREEN SHATTA

Of all the condiments that complement the flavour of Palestinian cuisine, the spicy shattas (hot sauces) are my favourite. We make a red shatta with fermented red chillies.

This green shatta recipe keeps the zing of the fresh coriander (cilantro) and the citrusy pepperiness of the fresh coriander (cilantro) complementing a labaneh plate or garnishing a lentil

250 g / 9 ounces green
chillies, stemmed and
coarsely chopped
1 garlic clove, coarsely
chopped
½ teaspoon salt
80 g / 2¾ ounces fresh
coriander (cilantro),
stems removed
and leaves coarsely
chopped
1 tablespoon fresh lemon
juice
1 tablespoon extra-virgin
olive oil

In a food processor, combine the chillies, garlic, and salt. Pulse into a chunky texture. Add the coriander leaves, lemon juice, and olive oil. Pulse into a fine yet grainy texture. Store in an airtight jar in the refrigerator for up to a week.



MAKES 250 G / 1 CUP





LABANEH BALLS WITH NIGELLA SEEDS

1 kg / 4 cups Greek
yoghurt or goat milk
yoghurt
1 teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons nigella
seeds
1 tablespoon extra-virgin
olive oil

MAKES 25 LABANEH
BALLS

Essential to Palestinian breakfasts is laban (yoghurt). There are many different kinds to enjoy it. Either you have it in its fresh form, rich, and fluffy, or you have it dried into balls, plain, but they can also be served coated with red ground sumac or other spices. At Akko, they use sumac, zaatar, and a mix of turmeric and cumin.

Some people add spices to the laban immediately or store them in olive oil. Others add the spices at serving time. In both cases, put in a jar, cover them with olive oil, and store at room temperature or in the refrigerator in the dark for up to 3 months.

I personally prefer making them plain, with spices or nigella seeds just before serving.

Line a sieve with cheesecloth. Add the yoghurt and strain the whey. Wrap the cheesecloth very tightly around the yoghurt in a bowl, and refrigerate for 2 days until the laban is firm.

Check the labaneh; it may need to be tied tightly and left for 12 hours in the refrigerator to get firm.

To make the balls, spread a dry cheesecloth on a tray. Place 20 grams or a spoonful of labaneh and roll it into a ball. Place on the prepared tray. Repeat until all the labaneh is used. Cover the balls with another cloth and refrigerate.

Place the nigella seeds in a bowl and toss the labaneh balls in them. They are coated on all sides. Serve on a plate with olive oil.

FIG SALAD

8 figs
2 tablespoons extra-virgin
olive oil
1 teaspoon ground sumac

SERVES 4

This fig salad is actually the simplest recipe in the book might be the one with the most complex flavours as it is by nature without intervention from cooks. Figs that have a very deep, intense flavour that is both sweet and salty at the same time extremely close to savoury.

This recipe combines the three flavors of Palestine: fig, olive oil and sumac. There are two fig seasons in Palestine, the first at the beginning of summer, when we get the large green figs and the second in midsummer, when the small green anise figs appear. This recipe works with both of them.

Cut the figs from the top down all four sides but not all the way. Keep the four pieces attached at the bottom. Drizzle the olive oil and the sumac on top and serve.











DEAD SEA SALT

Drive just outside Bethlehem and the verdant green of our olive groves and gardens gives way to a dramatically different rocky desert landscape. Five minutes away, with your ears popping from the steep decline, you are at the Dead Sea, the lowest point on earth. This was once an impressive place famous for its minerals and its buoyancy, which has produced so many photographs of visitors floating while reading newspapers and the like. Even today, the waters, along with those of the River Jordan that feeds into it, are sadly diminished.

Even though a large portion of the Dead Sea lies within the occupied West Bank, few places along the water's edge are accessible to Palestinians. The retreating shoreline is dotted with Israeli settlement resorts and companies extracting minerals. There is only one Palestinian salt producer still located in the West Bank Salt Company. Abu Hussein has been at the site since before the 1967 war. With steely determination, Abu Hussein and his son, general manager Hussam Hallaq, have remained there.

The first time I ever headed off the main road toward the company, I stopped by the remains of an abandoned hotel. It looked strangely familiar. I soon realised that this eerie spot was the Lido Hotel, which I had seen in my grandparents' holiday photographs. A few decades ago, when they visited the sea was a few steps away. Now its ruins are 2 to 3 kilometres (1¼ to 2 miles) from the shoreline.

Hussam nodded knowingly when I told him this. His family's story is dominated by the struggle to access the salty waters. For me, the company epitomises the prized quality of Palestinian resilience, or *sumud*. Despite many attempts to expel the Hallaqs from the land and to close their factory, they still face challenges. Yet with strength of will, they remain there, extracting salt.

what for me is the highest quality of sea salt in the world, with a taste that goes back millennia.

During a tour, Hussam showed me all the types of high-quality salt that his company refines with natural methods. However, I got fixated on the mound of grey material that constantly lay just behind him, tantalisingly out of reach. “Hussam, what is that?” I finally asked. He explained that it was the salt that comes from the sea before the cleaning process. Of course, that was the raw material that I then craved for my kitchen. That day, I returned home with my car packed down with a 20-kilogram (44-pound) bag of that unrefined salt. Hussam

helped me load it into the car, shaking his head and asking, “Are you to use that?”

Now, a few years later, Hussam continues to pack that unrefined salt for me. It is what we use in Bethlehem at Fawda restaurant and at A restaurant in London. I delight in bringing international chefs to the Salt Company and loading them up with raw salt to take back. It has a distinctive taste: it’s not briny but sharp, pure, unpolluted salt. It is so dry it has had little exposure to living beings because the Dead Sea’s extreme salinity means that no creatures can survive in it.

As anyone visiting Hussam easily sees, there is a shocking environmental disaster unfolding at the Dead Sea, and it is happening at an alarmingly idyllic place, so treasured in historical and religious literature, is vanishing for future generations. The River Jordan, which flows from the Golan Heights in the north and through the Sea of Galilee, no longer brings abundant water to replenish the Dead Sea. The river’s flow is supposed to be split between Syria, and Israel but has suffered greatly from over-extraction and pollution and is now little more than an unhealthy, muddy trickle. The Dead Sea level is dropping at a rate of over a metre (3 feet) a year, and various international efforts to try to reverse the trend have come to nought.

To some extent, the magical properties of the Dead Sea itself have contributed to its destruction. Potash—used mostly for fertilizer—is a valuable commodity and a longtime reason for water removal. Then there are the beauty resorts and spas, which have their origins as far back as Cleopatra. She could not have imagined the mass tourism of today with its ongoing negative ecological impact.

It always impresses me how at the West Bank Salt Company enormous amounts of water are lost. Only salt crystals stay in the drying ponds; the rest of the water gets pumped back to the sea. There is a tube that now stretches 2 kilometres (1¼ miles) down to the water’s edge and then a second tube that returns the water to the sea. The salt is processed, washed, and cleaned.

This is how the factory has functioned since before 1967. Methods of salt production have not changed. Indeed, they cannot be changed. The

in what is known as Area C of the West Bank—the 60 percent that is under Israel's full control. It is virtually impossible for Palestinians to get Israeli permission to erect new structures here and so only those that existed before 1967 can be used for salt production by Hussam's team. This is why the salt production process takes place in Jericho.

Despite all the challenges, the company supplies the tastiest salt in the world. It is unimaginable.

LOUKMET

MOLOKHIA

3 tablespoons extra-virgin
olive oil
5 garlic cloves, half
crushed and half thinly
sliced
½ teaspoon coriander
seeds
½ teaspoon ground
allspice
1 teaspoon salt
1 bunch fresh coriander
(cilantro) leaves, finely
chopped and stems
discarded
75 g / 3 cups fresh
molokhia leaves, or
1 to 1½ cups frozen,
finely chopped (set a
few fresh whole leaves
aside for garnish)
Juice of 1 lemon
475 ml / 2 cups water
200 g / 1 cup medium-
grain rice
4 small green chillies,
stemmed and halved
lengthwise
1 lemon, unwaxed, sliced

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BETHLEHEM

Loukmeh in Arabic means “mouthful.” This dish is the traditional way molokhia (*Corchorus olitoria*, spinach or jute mallow) is usually prepared. This green is in the summer with fresh leaves. It is found in Palestine, Tunisia, and Japan. In Palestine, the best molokhia is

Molokhia is an acquired taste, but it was one as a child and still is. It is disappearing in its winter availability of refrigeration, fewer people are drying molokhia—fresh and dried—have very distinct and in this recipe, fresh or frozen can be used to make this mouthful to be served in a spoon almost as an amuse

In a pot, heat 1 tablespoon of the olive oil over medium-high heat. Add the crushed garlic, coriander seeds, allspice, ½ teaspoon of the chopped coriander leaves, and stir. Add the chopped coriander and stir. When the molokhia wilts, add water to cover it. Bring to medium and cook for 10 to 12 minutes, uncovered, until tender. Stir in the lemon juice.

Meanwhile, bring the 475 ml / 2 cups water and the remaining salt to a boil over medium heat. Stir in the rice, cover the pot, reduce to low, and leave it to cook for 15 to 20 minutes; do not stir. Drain until the rice is cooked. Keep the pot covered and let it absorb the steam, then fluff the rice with a fork.

In a small pan, heat another 1 tablespoon of the olive oil over medium heat and fry the chillies on both sides until they are cooked and slightly charred. Set the chillies aside on paper towels.

In the same pan, fry the thinly sliced garlic cloves over medium heat until golden and crispy, about 3 minutes. Set aside on paper towels.

Add the remaining 1 tablespoon of olive oil to the same pan. Fry the remaining chopped coriander until crisp, and drain on paper towels.

In the same frying pan, fry the fresh whole molokhia leaves until

SERVES 6

15 minutes, and drain on paper towels.

To assemble the dish, scoop up a rounded ball of rice with your fingers and push with your fingers in the middle of the ball to create a hole. Fill the hole with molokhia, then cover with some more rice to end up with a ball of rice with the molokhia in the heart.

Place a large spoonful of the molokhia stew in a bowl, then top with a ball of rice. Sprinkle with the fried coriander, chillies, garlic, fried onion, and a fresh lemon slice. Continue to assemble bowls until all the ingredients are used. And all of that is a couple of mouthfuls of molokhia.









BARBECUED TOMATO SALAD

700 g / 1½ pounds ripe
tomatoes
2 tablespoons extra-virgin
olive oil
1½ teaspoons dried zaatar
leaves, chopped
½ teaspoon coarse
sea salt
2 tablespoons fresh
spearmint leaves,
chopped
1 tablespoon peppermint
leaves, chopped
Juice of 1 lemon
1 tablespoon crumbled
laban jameed (see
page 33)

On a Palestinian barbecue, of course, there are lamb chops, pork chops, chicken, and more. But we also grill whole small onions, tomatoes, and vegetables. A tomato from a barbecue is fantastic if you manage to grill things like sujuk sausages (spicy, dry fermented chicken, lamb, and vegetables). This tomato salad is the ideal accompaniment to whatever you

Prepare a gas or charcoal fire in the barbecue.

In a bowl, toss the tomatoes with the olive oil, and grill the tomatoes directly on the barbecue grill. Reserve

Turn the tomatoes on the grill, until they are nicely charred. They should take about 3 minutes. Move the tomatoes to the side of the barbecue away from the heat if it isn't available. Cook for another 2 to 3 minutes, turning and charring more. Remove from the heat.

Add both types of mint to the flavored oil that you made with the lemon juice and mix well.

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Cut the cooked tomatoes into quarters with a sharp knife. If they are damaged or squashed, transfer to a serving dish. Sprinkle the laban jameed on top to finish.

SERVES 6

AUBERGINES ROASTED WITH TAHINIA

4 large aubergines
Olive oil
95 g / 1/3 cup tahinia
4 garlic cloves
Juice of 2 lemons
2 chillies, finely chopped
1/2 tsp fine salt
6 tablespoons water
1 bunch dill, fronds
coarsely chopped and
stems discarded
1 bunch flat-leaf parsley,
leaves only, coarsely
chopped
1 teaspoon nigella seeds
1 teaspoon coriander seeds
2 tablespoons
pomegranate seeds
2 tablespoons toasted
pine nuts

We use aubergine (eggplant) in all manner of recipe vegetable when it's roasted, charred, and smoky, as in this fantastic baba ghanouj is. This recipe works as a staple on a shared table and it screams summer to my palate.

Preheat the oven to 200°C / 400°F.

Rub the aubergines with the olive oil and place them in a tray for about 45 minutes, turning them every 10 minutes so they cook evenly.

Meanwhile, prepare the tahinia sauce. Combine the tahinia, 2 of the olive oil, 2 of the garlic cloves, the lemon juice, chillies, and water in a food processor. With the motor running, add the water slowly, mixing until the sauce is smooth.

Place the aubergines on a serving dish, and press down slightly. Drizzle on the tahinia sauce, and sprinkle the dill, parsley, coriander seeds on top. Then sprinkle on the pomegranate seeds and pine nuts.

Thinly slice the remaining 2 garlic cloves. Heat a little oil in a pan over medium heat. Add the garlic and fry until golden, 2 minutes. Sprinkle with the garlic on top, and serve.



SUMMER

95



KIBBEH NAYYEH

250 g / 1½ cups fine-grain
bulgur wheat
½ kg / 1 pound lamb or
goat mince (ground
lamb or goat)
½ onion, finely chopped
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon allspice
¼ teaspoon ground black
pepper
¼ teaspoon dried red
pepper flakes
¼ teaspoon ground cumin
¼ teaspoon ground
cardamom
1 tablespoon extra-virgin
olive oil
Juice of ½ lemon

SERVES 6

Kibbeh is a classic dish made of ground meat and wheat, shaped into a ball.

Kibbeh nayyeh, or raw kibbeh, is common in the region and especially in the northern mountains. I enjoyed the taste of raw meat since I was a child, and it was for everyone. Kibbeh nayyeh is the perfect dish for those who's not a fan of a tartare. Even though the texture of the kibbeh nayyeh is milder and the bulgur give a delicate fragrance to the meat.

In a bowl, pour water over the bulgur wheat, until 1 cm / ¾ inch of water above its surface. Set it aside until it absorbs all the water, add some more. When the water is absorbed, pass it through a sieve. Use your hands to squeeze out the excess water.

Use a mortar and pestle to pound the meat, onion, and spices to a consistent texture, until you can cut into it with a spoon. Then transfer to a large bowl. Add the onion, salt, and spices together.

Divide the mixture into two to four batches. Pound each batch with a mortar and pestle until it is all of a consistent texture. The heat of the mortar and pestle doesn't alter the flavor of the meat.

Combine all the batches in a bowl. Add ½ teaspoon lemon juice. Mix quickly so the acidity of the lemon juice doesn't alter the meat.

Spread the meat on a plate. Drizzle the remaining olive oil on top. Use a fork to add some patterns, then serve.





THE NATSHEH

BROTHERS

At the heart of first-class cuisine is top-quality meat and produce. I am so fortunate to live close to the original shop of the best butchers in Bethlehem, the heart of the crowded old souk.

A visit to one of the two Natsheh Butcheries is not for the weak-hearted. There are no neatly packaged, precisely weighed cuts as found in a supermarket. Instead, there are fresh carcasses of sheep, goats, and cows hanging just inside the entrance of the constantly busy store and filling the deep fridge inside. Their discerning customers sit and wait, sipping the complimentary Arabiyya. The men of the Natsheh family skillfully chop the desired cuts of meat to order. There is constant chatter as the butchers and the shoppers exchange tips on the best to prepare and serve different Palestinian dishes in which meat traditionally takes a role. After school or during holidays, the boys of the Natsheh family form part of the shop team, lending a hand and learning the business.

The Natsheh butchers carry the pride that comes from working for generations in the same trade. They own their own livestock farms, keeping sheep and goats, which brings an extra level of commitment and expertise. A commemorative stone close to the shops testifies, the souk was opened in 1929, during the British Mandate period. The marketplace was designed by the Bethlehem architect, Elias Anastas. One of its original purposes was to impose regulations on butchers as in the past locals ran their own makeshift operations on their farms or outside their homes. The majority of professional butch-

stores have remained in the original, main square of the souk ever since it established.

Over the years, the Natsheh business has become part of our town life and family traditions. As a young child, I was rarely taken to the souk, grew up hearing constant references to the butchers. After becoming a chef and working with them for years, I still find wonderful new connections. Once, when my father persuaded me to recreate his aunt's braciole recipe, a description of how to cut the meat thinly so that I could pound it and make it into a roulade drew a smile from the old uncle of the young butcher I had ordered it from. He remembered my great-aunt asking for just the same

Lamb meat, or mutton, is the main type of meat used in Palestine. Our local variety of sheep, known as Awassi, is common to the wide region and has a distinct, relatively mild flavour, with the fat, called *liyeh*, concealed in a pouch under its flat tail. The basics that butchers must master include how to grind lamb meat for kebabs, adding parsley, finely chopped onion, and sometimes green chillies; how to cut meat for cutlets; and how to prepare a whole animal. For special occasions, whole sheep are often sent off to be cooked in the local, communal wood-burning oven. Mansaf is such a dish that you will often find customers ordering large lamb cuts to be added to the top of a steaming tray of rice with lashings of laban jai.

In Western cooking, nose-to-tail eating has become a modern trend to tackle food waste and show respect for the life of the animals we use. However, it is worth noting that in some parts of the world, including Palestine, this idea has always been the norm. At the Natsheh butchers, you see this works in practice. It is not just the prized cuts that are on display but also the delicious, nutrient-rich organs, the tails, and the feet. When shopping, the weight of the order often includes the bones. These can be clearly seen and taken home as most people continue to make meat stocks at home, with herbs, onions, and vegetables. Fat is stored for use in shawarma skewers between the meat for moisture and taste.

I always value my conversations with the Natsheh butchers and their professionalism. It is a great privilege to be allowed to walk into the fridge to select a piece of meat or the entire sheep that I would like for my restaurant. The butchers are also ready to indulge some of my requests. It is uncommon to age beef in Palestine, and I know the Natshehs were particularly convinced when I first asked them to do it for me, but they were ready to try, and soon I had converted them to the idea. They even asked me to give updates and suggest that they keep the meat longer. This is how we eventually came to dry-age beef for 6 weeks. Several years on from my first aged *côte de boeuf*, I know that today, the Natshehs only take home the scraps for their own kitchens.

The butchers maintain high standards through the whole process of feeding, breeding, and slaughtering their animals. Small businesses ensure a more sustainable, ethical kind of farming with a high standard of animal welfare. In the hectic marketplace, the Natshehs also impose careful hygiene measures and keep the perfect temperature controls. I am so impressed by their practices that I often bring visitors for a stop at the store when I am on tours in Bethlehem. I enjoy taking a fresh lamb's liver from the butcher, adding a dash of olive oil, a little salt, and a squeeze of lemon juice, and serving it to my surprised guests.

KOFTA IN GRAPE LEAVES

24 to 26 small grape
leaves
500 g / 18 ounces beef
mince (ground beef)
1 onion, finely chopped
2 teaspoons salt, plus
more for sprinkling
1 teaspoon ground allspice
1/4 teaspoon ground
nutmeg
1/4 teaspoon ground
cardamom
1/4 teaspoon ground black
pepper
1/4 teaspoon ground
cinnamon
1 bunch flat-leaf parsley,
leaves only, finely
chopped
5 tomatoes, sliced
2 tablespoons extra-virgin
olive oil

These round beef meatballs tightly wrapped in grape leaves may be one of my favorite recipes from my mother's to replicate it and use it as an inspiration for new dishes on the theme. Notably in Akub restaurant in London, the meat was with skate; at Fawda in Bethlehem we use sharing the original recipe, which says home to me.

To prepare the grape leaves, first remove the stems. Blanch in a large pot of boiling water for 2 to 3 minutes, until tender.

Mix the meat with the onion, salt, allspice, nutmeg, cardamom, cinnamon, and parsley. Divide the meat into twelve portions.

Preheat the oven to 180°C / 350°F.

Wrap each portion of meat in grape leaves to make balls, 2 leaves per meatball.

Arrange the tomatoes and wrapped meatballs in a baking dish. Drizzle with the olive oil, and sprinkle a bit of salt on top. Bake for 30 minutes.





ROSTO MARIAM

3 tablespoons samneh
(ghee)
1 kg / 2¼ pounds beef
chuck, cut into 3 cm /
1¼-inch cubes
5 garlic cloves, crushed
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon ground black
pepper
½ teaspoon ground
allspice
¼ teaspoon ground
nutmeg
¼ teaspoon ground
cinnamon
2 tablespoons white
vinegar
600 ml / 1½ to 2½ cups
water

SERVES 4 TO 6

Mariam was my great-grandmother, another relative whom I unfortunately never was passed down to me and became an essential family tradition.

It is a stew, even though we call it Mariam's great-grandchildren, my cousins. The scent of Rosto Mariam wherever we are in the world.

Apparently, Mariam was a fantastic cook with variations on traditional dishes as well as her own in her kitchen.

For this recipe, she replaced wine vinegar with lemon juice. In her home, in the outskirts of Beth Shalom gardens full of almonds, figs, apricots, was a dish most likely made by her. She would serve it with whatever vegetable was in season or a hard-boiled egg.

There was a cheerful little stream on the rich soil of my great-grandparents' land. After going to that stone home and picking apricots, that tasted different than anywhere else.

¹⁰⁵ Each generation and member in the family passed down to them and probably added little variations of Mariam's cooking was the unlimited use of butter).

In a large pot over medium-high heat, melt the butter, garlic, salt, and pepper. Cook the meat cubes 10 minutes until they are evenly cooked on all sides. Add 1 cup of vinegar. Stir well, using a wooden spoon to scrape the bottom of the pot. Add 360 ml / 1½ cups of water and reduce the heat to low. Cook for an hour, until the water level decreases, add another 120 ml of water. My great-grandmother used to say to add a teaspoon of salt.

worth is a bit like all other measurements from a handful—which are very subjective. Teacups to large teacups. Nevertheless, add water until nothing sticks to the bottom.)

After 45 to 60 minutes, a bit of sauce should form. If not, add another 120 ml / ½ cup water and let it simmer to end up with a thick sauce and the delicious

PURSLANE

DIP

100 g / 2 cups purslane
2 tablespoons extra-virgin
olive oil
2 spring onions (scallions),
finely chopped
¼ teaspoon salt
20 g / ½ cup mint leaves
Bread, preferably kmaj or
flatbread, to serve

SERVES 2 TO 4

Purslane, with its rounded, thick leaves, is available in winter and summer in Palestine. It's a popular find on diners. It's the original component of fattoush salad—a bread salad. It traditionally didn't include lettuce, but would be made with it.

I discovered this combination a while back, and I've been enjoying it ever since. Purslane has a delicate earthy flavor. When it is in season, I always add it to as many salads and soups as I can.

Pull the purslane leaves off the stems and discard the stems.

In a frying pan over medium heat, heat 1 tablespoon of olive oil. Add the purslane and sauté for 3 to 4 minutes, until tender.

Mix the purslane and the spring onions in a bowl and add the salt. Refrigerate for 1 hour.

To serve, transfer the purslane mixture to a plate. Tear the bread into hand and add to the middle of the plate. Drizzle the remaining olive oil on top. Serve with bread for dipping.



SUMMER

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YAKHNI

BAMIA

Olive oil
 2 onions, 1 finely chopped,
 1 diced
 Salt
 500 g / 18 ounces lamb
 shoulder, cut into
 medium-size cubes
 ½ teaspoon black pepper
 4 ripe tomatoes, diced
 2 bay leaves
 1 cinnamon stick
 4 cardamom pods
 400 g / 14 ounces
 tomato sauce
SUMMER
 240 ml / 1 cup water plus
 warm water as needed
 10 garlic cloves, 6 crushed,
 4 left whole
 2 bunches of coriander
 (fresh cilantro), finely
 chopped
 800 g / 1¾ pounds okra,
 the smallest size, either
 fresh or frozen and
 thawed, trimmed
 ½ teaspoon ground cumin
 ½ lemon
 Hot cooked rice, to serve

Bamia, or okra, is one of my favorite vegetables, often underrated. We have a preconception that okra is a bit gooeey, because of its particular texture. Well, it is a bit gooeey, to a point where it's often not recommended. The advice might be to not cook bamia for too long, but my intention is to try to convince as many people as possible of its wonderful texture and taste.

Different sizes and types of okra are available in different parts of the world, particularly in Africa and the Middle East. In Palestine, about mid-May to the beginning of June, when the weather is warm, bamia pops up in the market. I love to play with bamia recipes.

I sometimes deep fry it like chips, but I prefer to cook it the traditional way. Years ago, I learned how to cook bamia with Mohamad Hadid, a chef from Nazareth and Safad. His recipe is very similar to my family's, which I offer here, despite the fact that I left the country and having lived in exile since

Heat 2 tablespoons olive oil in a large pot over medium heat. Add the chopped onion and ¼ teaspoon salt. Cook and stir for 5 minutes. Add the lamb and the pepper, and keep stirring, for 5 to 6 minutes. Add the tomatoes and the bay leaves, cinnamon stick, cardamom, and tomato sauce. Add the water and leave to cook for 40 minutes.

Meanwhile, in a deep pan, heat another 2 tablespoons olive oil over medium heat. Add the diced onion, crushed garlic cloves, and cumin. Sauté until the onion is translucent, about 5 minutes.

Add the okra, cumin, and ¼ teaspoon salt. Sauté for 10 minutes, until the okra is cooked through and tender. Add 200 g / 7 ounces tomato sauce and cook for 5 minutes. The okra should be tender but not mushy. If required to prevent

SERVES 6

1/2 cup of warm water.

With a slotted spoon, transfer the lamb into the liquid from the pot with the meat through a sieve. If the liquid in the pot has the consistency of a soup, continue to cook for 10 to 12 minutes, until the

Meanwhile, in a small pan, heat 1 tablespoon of oil. Add the remaining coriander and whole garlic clove and sauté, about 3 minutes. This is called the *raita*. Squeeze of the lemon and serve with a side of

ROASTED GREEN CHICKPEAS

Juice of 1 lemon
1½ teaspoons salt
¼ teaspoon dried red
pepper flakes
¼ teaspoon hot paprika
400 g / 3 cups fresh green
chickpeas in the pod

SERVES 4

As soon as green chickpeas appear in Palestinian markets, it's a frenzy of shoppers. Like a lot of other products, they are in season. In carts across the city, they are also sold by street vendors. Abdallah and his wife, May, always make sure to take advantage of the availability of the chickpeas and roast them at home. As a kid, I would sometimes go to study at the house where the uncle would help me with chemistry, his specialty. I remember that when chickpeas were in season, that would be the best time to visit.

I've added my own twist to this recipe. However, it still has the same smell and taste that you would find in any Palestinian home. It's a simple snack that everybody enjoys in Palestine.

Preheat the grill (broiler).

In a bowl, mix together the lemon juice, salt, red pepper flakes, and hot paprika. Add the chickpeas and mix well. Evenly spread out the chickpeas on a baking sheet, making sure they are in a single layer, to evenly roast.

Broil until they are roasted and crispy, giving them a slight char colouring, 5 to 7 minutes total. Enjoy them hot or cooled slightly, with the beans still warm.





DIBS AND TAHINIA SHORT- BREAD

150 g / 9 tablespoons
salted butter, at room
temperature, chopped
100 g / ½ cup demerara
sugar (or substitute
another raw sugar)
100 g / ⅓ cup dibs
175 g / ½ cup plus
1½ teaspoons tahinia
300 g / 2½ cups all-
purpose flour, plus
more for the work
surface
½ teaspoon baking
powder

MAKES 30 BISCUITS
(COOKIES)

This is a distinctive biscuit with a nutty, sl
reminiscent of childhood for Palestinians
(see page 14). Traditionally, dibs (grape m
tahinia in equal parts to make the creamy
for breakfast. This was a favourite of Bab
breakfast table.

The dough here is a crumbly one, s
This recipe makes about 30 biscuits, whic
but I promise they will quickly disappear.

In a mixing bowl, combine the butter, sugar, di
handheld beater for 5 minutes, until smooth.

In a separate bowl, whisk together the flour ar

With the beater on low speed, add the flour m
tahinia mixture until smooth.

Turn the dough out onto a floured surface and
smooth. Divide the dough into two portions, p
plastic wrap, and chill in refrigerator for 1 to 2

Preheat the oven to 180°C / 350°F. Line two b.
paper.

Working with one portion of dough at a time, i
surface until it is ½ to 1 cm / ¼ to ⅜ inch thic
biscuits, and place them on the prepared sheet
between the biscuits. Repeat with the second j

Bake, one sheet at a time, for 12 to 15 minutes,
brown and firm to the touch. Allow to cool on
container for 4 to 5 days.

BARBECUED WHOLE CHICKEN

80 ml / 1/3 cup extra-virgin
olive oil, plus more as
needed

60 ml / 1/4 cup fresh
lemon juice

6 garlic cloves, crushed

1 teaspoon salt

1 tablespoon ground
sumac

1 teaspoon dried red
pepper flakes

114 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin

1/4 teaspoon ground
cinnamon

1/4 teaspoon ground
allspice

Peel of 1 white or
black lousi (dried
lime), grated with a
Microplane

1 whole chicken, about
1 1/2 kg / 3 1/3 pounds,
spatchcocked

TO FINISH

3 garlic cloves, crushed
1 green chilli, sliced

The sight of mouthwatering charcoal-grilled barbecued whole chickens is common in Palestine. On sunny days, every house has a barbecue. At the same time, in every town, there is at least one restaurant that serves barbecued chicken. In Bethlehem, it is Qabar restaurant. It was established in 1974 and is still one of the most popular. I grew up going there to pick up some chicken to bring home with bread and a simple salad.

In a large nonreactive bowl, mix together the olive oil, lemon juice, salt, sumac, red pepper flakes, cumin, cinnamon, allspice, and pepper flakes. Add the chicken and rub the mix all over it. If you don't plan to grill it immediately, cover the bowl and refrigerate overnight.

To barbecue on a charcoal or gas grill, prepare the grill with a cooler zone. Place the chicken, skin side up, on the cooler side of the grill. Cover the grill and cook until the chicken is done, 40 to 45 minutes. Carefully flip the chicken and place it on the hotter side of the grill, skin side down, to crisp the skin and finish the chicken, another 10 to 15 minutes. It should take 50 to 60 minutes total.

To cook in the oven, preheat the oven to 220°C / 425°F. Place the chicken on a baking sheet and cook on medium-high heat on the stove.

Put the chicken in the skillet, skin side up. Sear for about 2 minutes. Flip the chicken over. Sear on the second side for about 4 minutes. Flip the chicken until you have charred the skin.

Transfer the chicken to a baking sheet, skin side up, add the remaining marinade, and roast for another 25 to 30 minutes, to fully cook through.

Remove from the heat of the grill or oven and let rest for 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, in a bowl, mix together the garlic, chilli, olive oil, and sumac. Drizzle over the chicken, cut into pieces, and serve.

2 tablespoons olive oil
Juice of 1 lemon
1 teaspoon ground sumac

SERVES 4



SUMMER

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MOUHALABIEH

750 ml / 3 $\frac{1}{8}$ cups whole
milk (or substitute
almond milk)
120 g / 1 cup sugar
1 teaspoon ground mastic
80 g / $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cornstarch
Finely chopped pistachios,
to garnish

SERVES 6 TO 8

Mouhalabieh, or milk pudding, is a comfort food that transports you with each mouthful. The mastic is ideal for joining the flavour to the terroir.

Served chilled, with dates stuffed with orange or ripe fruit from Bethlehem, or a few cubes of mouhalabieh is an ideal dessert for a warm day.

Heat about two-thirds of the milk with the sugar over medium heat. Meanwhile, whisk the remaining milk in a bowl until smooth. Slowly add the milk to the pot, stirring continuously with a wooden spoon so the milk doesn't stick to the bottom.

Once the pudding thickens, remove it from the heat and pour into glass serving bowls. Let cool at room temperature in the refrigerator for a minimum of 2 hours.

Garnish with the pistachios and serve.





O R A N G E S A N D

R O S E S W I T H

T E T A E M I L Y

I never had a chance to meet my paternal grandmother, Emily, but traces of her adventures, interests, and passions always surrounded me and have made their way into my kitchen.

I grew up visiting the historic stone house where I now live, to see my grandfather, Nakhleh. This was once Emily's home, too, and even though she passed away in 1967, a full decade before I was born, her memory has not faded. Sido Nakhleh loved to tell tales of their lives together, and my maternal grandmother, Julia, who happened to be Emily's sister, was another well-known storyteller. There are faded images of Emily which have always tantalised me. Family photographs offer glimpses of her living in Kobe, Japan, early on in her life, until World War II forced my grandparents to leave in 1943. There are also photos of Emily in Bombay, where my father was born. However, the ones that most affect me show Emily in Palestine. I treasure pictures of her in our family's orange groves in Jaffa, which were lost in the Nakba (catastrophe) of 1948.

In one photograph Emily is smiling widely while touching her wide-brimmed hat as the Palestinian sun beats down. In another, she sits with her siblings by a pool surrounded by lush trees, enjoying her oranges, just me

before the land was lost overnight.

The relationship with the land is built into the memory of its people. Jaffa oranges, most notably the Shamouti variety, famous for their vivid color and sweetness, are part of our rich history and heritage. The oranges were internationally exported and were for decades a source of great pride and wealth. Each family that was involved in the successful trade has its own story, but little of ours has been passed onto my generation. It always felt like something about this loss was too painful. I still have the land ownership documents: Sidon Nakhleh carefully filed in the family archive, and I wonder how he and Emily dealt with the nostalgia and whether they expected to ever return to the stolen groves.

Like so many Palestinians, I always feel a deep sense of longing for justice. While as Bethlehemites, my family was not forcibly displaced from our hometown, plunged into the uncertain fate of refugees, we still have losses. In a sense these losses are common to all Palestinian families: various memories of oranges, olive trees, prickly pears, and fishermen. Planning archives of pre-1948 Jaffa are not publicly accessible, so I have been unable to link our deeds to an exact location there. This leaves me uselessly at photographs for clues. My grandmother's oranges have mythical status for me. I wish I knew if the groves still exist, if there were still people picking the juicy fruits this season or sinking their teeth into one right now.

For me, the tangy flavour of Jaffa oranges will always be associated with my Aunt Emily's carefree smile. Memories of both work their way in when I make one of my Teta Julia's signature recipes. Her Clementine Givree—a special Year's Eve dinner menu—is the dessert that I most enjoy making, especially on big occasions and family get-togethers.

The magically uplifting fragrance of roses is also inextricably linked to my Aunt Emily. After all, I spent years as a child running around on land which was planted with rosebushes long before I was born. I was always told that these brightly coloured flowers, and I have continued to tend them ever since. My Teta Emily planted new ones for her in the garden by the house over the years. After opening a restaurant Fawda in Bethlehem, I became obsessed with trying out ways that I could grow organically and sustainably. I loved to create desserts with fresh edible petals and would secretly smile as I did so, thinking of my Aunt Emily's dishes from Bethlehem as an homage to my Teta Emily.



STUFFED COURGETTE FLOWERS

1 egg
125 g / 1 cup all-purpose
flour
1 tablespoon extra-virgin
olive oil
1 tablespoon milk
8 courgette flowers
(zucchini blossoms)
130 g / 4½ ounces baladi
or Nabulsi cheese
(soaked and drained
to remove some
salt), or substitute
another brined cheese,
crumbled
1 tablespoon chopped
fresh flat-leaf parsley
leaves
1 teaspoon nigella seeds
400 ml / 1⅔ cups
vegetable oil or
sunflower oil

In summer, when the small green courgettes (zucchini) and they arrive at the markets ready for *mahshi* (stuffed), they often have their sunny yellow blossoms on them, but we do not use these much in Palestine. Yet when I used to buy courgettes, I would be like a kid with all those beautiful courgette flowers available, so I would stuff them with baladi cheese (a fresh local cheese of cow milk) and deep-fry them. They would be a perfect accompaniment to a drink or as an amuse-bouche.

To make the batter, in a large bowl, whisk the egg. While whisking, add the flour, olive oil, and the milk. Leave to rest at room temperature.

Open the courgette flowers carefully and remove the pistils.

In a small bowl, combine the cheese, parsley, and nigella seeds. Stuff the flowers with this mixture and pinch the tips of the flowers to close the stuffing in.

In a medium-size frying pan, heat the vegetable oil over high heat. When the oil is hot, after 2 to 3 minutes, decrease the heat to medium.

Working in batches, dip the stuffed courgette flowers in the batter. Carefully slip them into the hot oil; don't crowd the pan. Fry each side, about 2 minutes. Remove from the oil and place on paper towels to drain. Serve immediately.

AUBERGINE SALAD WITH TAHINIA

3 tablespoons extra-virgin
olive oil

2 large aubergines, cut
into 1 cm / $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch
cubes

1 onion, thinly sliced

4 garlic cloves

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt

3 tablespoons tahinia

Juice of 2 lemons

$1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons ground
sumac

Up to 120 ml / $\frac{1}{2}$ cup
water

20 g / $\frac{3}{4}$ ounce laban
jameed (salted and
dried yoghurt) (or
substitute a cheese
of your liking, despite
laban jameed not being
a cheese)

A few mint leaves

Aubergines (eggplant) are an essential part especially celebrated in such places such as of Bethlehem. It is known far and wide for and its name is synonymous with a long, thin different-size aubergines are used differently. Small aubergines are pickled and stuffed with and carrots to make makdous. The medium rice and meat, while the large size is used for baba ghanoush, or salads. I am obsessed with taste. So, this recipe balances the sweetness intensity of the tahinia, and the tanginess of

In a large skillet over high heat, warm 2 tablespoons aubergines and onion and sauté. Decrease the golden and cook until the aubergines are soft.

To make the sauce, crush the garlic with the salt in the tahinia. Whisk in the lemon juice. Mix in with water until the sauce is liquid enough to coat

In a ¹²³mixing bowl, toss the cooked aubergines and coating them well.

Sprinkle the laban jameed over the top. Rub the hands to release their flavour, then sprinkle on 1 tablespoon of olive oil on top. Serve at once or serve later.

SERVES 4 TO 6



FIG JAM

1 kg / 2¼ pounds figs,
halved and stemmed
400 g / 2 cups sugar
25 g / 2 tablespoons
ground sumac
Juice of 1 lemon
100 g / 1 cup whole peeled
pistachios

MAKES THREE

250 ML / 1 CUP JARS

SUMMER

From a simple basket of fresh figs, to roasting a labaneh (strained and seasoned yoghurt changer).

The season of figs brings on all those red and purple figs—the best being the ones you yourself and bite into. Those delicious flavors bring sunshine to my table all summer long.

A few years ago, I was experimenting with sumac, when my cousin Jumana and I decided on a collaboration for her brand in Jordan, Karim. This jam recipe was the first to end up in the recipe book.

In a bowl, mix together the figs and sugar, gently mix the sumac and mix well, but gently, so as not to break the figs. Macerate at cool room temperature for 1 to 2 hours to get some juices. Transfer to a heavy pot.

Over high heat, bring the fig mixture to a boil, for 5 minutes, making sure the sugar and fig juices are dissolved. Decrease the heat, add the lemon juice, and cook for 125 minutes. The mixture will cook down to almost a jam consistency, but still have some whole figs. Continue cooking until the jam reaches 220°F on an instant-read thermometer. Add the pistachios and the heat.

Transfer the hot jam to sterilized jars, cover, and store in the refrigerator.

SHAWARMA

MEAT AND MARINADE

1 kg / 2½ pounds bavette
steak

6 garlic cloves, crushed

1 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon ground allspice

½ teaspoon ground
cinnamon

½ teaspoon ground
cardamom

½ teaspoon ground cumin

½ teaspoon ground
mastic

¼ teaspoon ground chilli
powder

¼ teaspoon ground
nutmeg

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ETHLEHEM

¼ teaspoon ground ginger

120 ml / ½ cup fresh
lemon juice

60 ml / ¼ cup white wine
vinegar

60 ml / ¼ cup extra-virgin
olive oil

Vegetable oil

TAHINIA SAUCE

120 ml / ½ cup fresh
lemon juice

2 garlic cloves

2 teaspoons tahinia

½ teaspoon salt

Shawarma is another iconic Palestinian street food. Palestinian main street, and you will see the skewer in shops and shawarma vendors slicing away. But you can make a fantastic sandwich at home with meat, spices, and vegetables. Just anticipating it will make your mouth water. Below are two ways to cook the meat: on the stove or in the oven.

To prepare the meat, cut the steak into thin strips about 4 inches long and a bit thicker than a julienne cut.

To make the marinade, in a large bowl, mix together the garlic, cinnamon, cardamom, cumin, mastic, chilli powder, nutmeg, lemon juice, vinegar, and olive oil. Add the meat and mix until the pieces are well coated. Cover and marinate in the fridge overnight.

The next day, take the meat out of the fridge and allow it to come to room temperature for at least a half hour.

To cook the beef on the stovetop, heat a large frying pan over medium heat with a dash of vegetable oil. Drain the meat and reserve the marinade. Lay a single layer of beef strips in the pan and cook until browned on both sides, 8 to 10 minutes. Just before you remove the beef from the pan, spoon a spoonful of the reserved marinade and stir well so the meat is coated in the juices. Repeat with the remaining meat until it is all cooked.

To cook the meat in the oven, preheat the oven to 150°C / 300°F. Lay a single layer of beef strips in a roasting pan or baking sheet with parchment paper. Lay a single layer of beef strips in the pan and spoon a bit of the marinade over the top. Cook for about 1¾ hours. Uncover the pan, increase the temperature to 200°C / 400°F, and cook for another 15 minutes, so the meat is browned.

While the meat is cooking, prepare the tahinia sauce. In a blender, add the lemon juice, garlic, tahinia, and salt and process until smooth. Then, with the blender running, slowly add the water. It should make a creamy sauce.

To assemble the shawarmas, take a pita and spread a bit of the tahinia sauce on it. Add the meat, the shatta for a spicy kick, and a few slices of cucumber and onion. Repeat as needed to use all the ingredients.

120 ml / ½ cup water

TO SERVE

8 half pitas, shrak, or
flatbreads

Green Shatta (page 76)

Pickled cucumber slices

Onion slices

SERVES 8





WATERMELON SALAD

150 g / 5¼ ounces Nabulsi
cheese (or substitute
another brined cheese)
2½ tablespoons extra-
virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons almonds
2 tablespoons fresh lemon
juice
2 tablespoons fresh mint
leaves
2 tablespoons fresh flat-
leaf parsley leaves
½ red or green chilli,
sliced into rings
600 g / 1⅓ pounds diced
watermelon
180 g / 6¼ ounces
tomatoes, halved and
cut into slivers
120 g / 4¼ ounces
cucumber, cut into
batons
90 g / 3¼ ounces pitted
cured black olives

SERVES 4 TO 6

Summer in Palestine without watermelon doesn't count as summer.

Watermelon became highly symbolic in modern culture when, after the occupation of East Jerusalem, and Gaza in 1967, Israel banned the Palestinian flag. In the early 1980s, Mansour circumvented this ban by painting the colours being the same as those of the flag.

As soon as the first watermelon arrives, everybody starts queuing up to buy it. It's the ideal evening snack or breakfast in Bethlehem. In Palestine, it is known to come from Jenin. I think a watermelon is perfect for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. When it's 30°C / 86°F, it is always a welcome sight.

Remove the Nabulsi cheese from its brine. Place it in a bowl with water to cover and change the water 3 times to reduce the saltiness of the cheese, aiming for the same size as the watermelon.

In a small pan, heat 1½ teaspoons of the olive oil and toast the almonds until golden, 3 minutes.

Prepare the dressing by mixing together the olive oil, the lemon juice, and a little bit of salt.

In a bowl, combine the cheese, chilli, watermelon, and olives. Add the dressing and toss gently.

To serve, transfer the salad to a serving bowl and garnish with the mint and parsley and the toasted almonds. It's better if it's made on the spot.

BRAISED SILEK WITH TAHINIA

20 g / ½ cup dried sumac
berries
2 tablespoons extra-virgin
olive oil
1 onion, finely chopped
3 garlic cloves, crushed
2 teaspoons salt
3 bunches silek (chard),
stalks and leaves
separated and chopped
4 tablespoons fresh lemon
juice
1 tablespoon dill seeds
1 green chilli, chopped
finely
1 teaspoon coriander seeds
3 tablespoons tahinia

CARAMELISED
ONION GARNISH
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 onion, finely chopped

SERVES 4 TO 6

Silek (chard) can be sautéed in olive oil with garlic, or used in place of grape leaves. In Gaza, it is often sumac, red tahinia, and lamb meat to make sumac take on that dish, with a vegetarian approach. Though the same sesame seeds as its paler cousins, red tahini sesame seeds that are slow-roasted in giant ovens. This yields its signature reddish tint.

Cover the sumac berries with water in a small saucepan and boil over medium-high heat. Set aside for 30 minutes, then pass through a sieve, keeping the liquid and discarding the solids.

In a large pot over medium heat, warm the olive oil. Add two-thirds of the garlic, the salt, and the silek stalks, stir, 8 minutes, until softened. Add the silek leaves, 2 tablespoons lemon juice, 1½ teaspoons of the dill seeds, the green chilli, coriander, and the sumac-infused water. Cover and braise for 10 to 12 minutes.

Remove the silek leaves from the cooking water. Pass the mixture through a fine-mesh sieve into a bowl and dispose of any solids.

To make the sauce, mix the tahinia, remaining lemon juice, and 1½ teaspoons dill seeds. Slowly add the red-tinted cooking liquid to thin the sauce to a pouring consistency.

To make the caramelised onion garnish, in a small pan over medium heat combine the olive oil and onion. Sauté for 15 to 20 minutes until golden.

To serve, place the braised silek in a bowl, drizzle the tahinia sauce, and garnish with caramelised onions. Enjoy!



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**A
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MISTAKA

BRIOCHE

2½ teaspoons dry baker's
yeast
80 g / 6½ tablespoons
sugar
200 ml / ¾ cup plus
2 tablespoons
lukewarm milk
500 g / 4 cups plus
3 tablespoons all-
purpose flour, plus
more for the work
surface
2 eggs
1 tablespoon orange
blossom water
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon ground
mastic
100 g / ½ cup unsalted
butter, at room
temperature, cut into
small cubes

EGG WASH

1 egg yolk
1 tablespoon milk

MAKES 1 LOAF

I grew up with stories of my late grandmother, Emi, who I got to meet, baking a fragrant mastic brioche with coloured eggs baked in the middle as an Easter treat. I and his siblings when they were young in Bethlehem, enjoying such brioches sent to us by family friends. The smell and taste are so evocative. I started making brioche without the egg, all year round. My favorite bread is with a bit of butter and quince jam.

In a small bowl, mix together the yeast, 40 g / 3 tablespoons and 50 ml / 3½ tablespoons of the milk. Set aside until it is foamy for 10 minutes.

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a dough hook, combine the remaining sugar, and the remaining milk. Mix at low speed until the ingredients are combined. Add the eggs, orange blossom mastic. Continue to mix at low speed for 8 minutes. Increase the speed and beat for another 5 minutes. Add the butter and beat for 2 minutes.

Scoop out pieces of dough with your hand and form into balls. Place them aside on a lightly floured work surface. Cover and leave to rise for 15 minutes.

Grease a 23 cm / 9-inch round cake pan. Press the rounded dough pieces into the pan to remove the gas that has formed. Put the dough pieces in the pan and let rise for 45 to 60 minutes, until doubled in size.

Preheat the oven to 180°C / 350°F.

To make the egg wash, mix the egg yolk and milk until well combined. Brush over the dough without pressing on the tops.

Bake for 20 to 25 minutes, until the top of the brioche is golden brown. Cover with aluminum foil or parchment paper and continue to bake for 20 to 25 minutes, until the brioche sounds hollow when tapped. Check the temperature 90°C / 190°F in the centre with an instant-read thermometer.

Transfer the brioche from the cake pan to a rack and leave to cool. Digging in.



AUTUMN

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LAHMET HATOUM

136 BETHLEHEM

- 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon samneh (ghee)
- 1 kg / 2¼ pounds boneless lamb, cut into cubes
- 9 garlic cloves
- 1 teaspoon allspice
- ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon ground coriander
- ¼ teaspoon ground cumin
- ¼ teaspoon ground cardamom
- ¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- ¼ teaspoon ground cloves
- Salt and ground black pepper
- Water
- 1 hot green chilli
- Juice of 2 lemons

In my great-grandmother's generation, all the cooks had their own twists on lamb and beef stews. This recipe made by one of the cousins, Hatoum, and the family. It has a very particular zing that's added cooking, which makes it a bit unusual and yet very

The home of that cousin is on the same street as grandparents' house in the Old City of Bethlehem. adjacent to the souk and the butcher's market is not hard to imagine how fresh the meat they were using was. To cross the street to pick up their lamb.

In a large pot, melt 1 tablespoon of the samneh over medium heat. Add the lamb cubes and sear on all sides for about 10 minutes until browned.

Crush 4 of the garlic cloves and add to the lamb along with cinnamon, coriander, cumin, cardamom, nutmeg, and cloves and pepper and stir for 2 to 3 minutes, until the meat is well coated.

Add water to cover the lamb and bring to a boil. Then decrease the heat and simmer. Taste the broth and add more salt and pepper, if needed.

Cover the pot and leave it to cook for about 45 minutes, until the lamb is tender and cooked through and the juices of the broth have thickened into practically a sauce.

Meanwhile, in a mortar, crush the remaining 5 cloves of garlic and mix in the lemon juice. Melt the remaining 1 teaspoon of samneh and mix in the lemon juice. Pour over the meat and the sauce while they are still simmering for 4 to 5 minutes longer. Then it is ready to be served.

SERVES 4 TO 6

PALESTINIAN PICKLED OLIVES

1 kg / 2¼ pounds fresh
green olives (make sure
the olives haven't been
dented while being
picked)

500 g / 3½ cups
coarse salt, plus
1½ tablespoons for
each 240 ml / 1 cup of
water in the brine

500 g / 1⅛ pounds lemons
3 to 4 green chillies
Olive oil

Fresh or brined grape
leaves

MAKES TWO 500 G /

1 PINT JARS

Pickled olives are a staple on every Palest lunch, and dinner. They go into sandwich olives are best served alone with some hc pure delight to savour. A lot of Palestinian their houses or in their own family grove. on their production of olive oil and pickle locations prides itself on having the best as we Palestinians have a bit of land, the olive tree. I was fortunate enough to plan today enjoy making pickled olives from tl recipe for pickling changes from one fam are more or less the same.

Wash and dry the olives. Traditionally the olive but you can score them with a knife on both s water and set aside for 3 days, changing the w

After 3 days, drain off the water. Coat the olive 2 days, draining off any excess water during th

On the fifth day, slice the lemons and chillies i
mix together. Drain the olives and mix with th

Fill sterilized jars with olives, lemon slices and for each jar, combine 240 ml / 1 cup water wit up the jars with brine. Add a tablespoon of oli grape leaves on top to seal the jars.

Close the jars and store them in a dark, dry ar to a year unopened.









S P I C E S W I T H

T A W F I K L A M A

On Bethlehem's historic Star Street, a short walk from Manger Square—b part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site—there is a tiny shop that celebrates rich culinary inheritance. I just open the door of Orient Mills, a store founded by the Lama family way back in 1936, and I am transported back in time to an intoxicating medley of scents: freshly roasted coffee, zaatar, sumac, pepper and incense. My grandmother Julia was a regular customer. After she set up a museum nearby with a group of Bethlehemite women in the 1970s (see p 186), she would go there most afternoons and would often pass by Orient Mills too. When I was small, I would accompany her and absorb all the deliciousness of those spices.

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BETHLEHEM

Years later, I set up Fawda, my restaurant in Bethlehem, just off the street, within easy reach of Orient Mills. It is a chef's dream to have a spice master close by at all times, and it has meant that I keep only minimal stock of spices. I have the delight of being able to buy what I need freshly ground day to day. Tawfik Lama and I even have our own rituals. Whenever I walk past his shop and find him busily serving customers, I head behind the counter to the back of the store where I sit on the wooden steps that lead to his storage area and wait my turn. Tawfik will hand me a cup of coffee to enjoy with a cigarette while I watch him and his assistant, Mohammad, at work. It always impresses me that they have memorised how their regulars like their Arabic coffee—the ratio of dark- and light-roasted beans with cardamom added to taste. That

store has three noisy coffee grinders constantly whirring away. In the neatly arranged glass jars, you will find all the classic Palestinian spices. There is the familiar ground sumac found in every local kitchen. It has a sour, tangy taste. You'll also find whole dried red sumac berries. In Palestine, the best come from Hebron. I often soak these and use their juice in a reduction to finish dishes or create sumaqiyeh. You will also find zaatar mix, another popular and common staple of every Palestinian breakfast table. It is delicious eaten with bread that has first been dipped in olive oil. Like the coffee, the mix is a matter of personal preference. It consists of the dried green leaves of the zaatar plant that grows wild around Bethlehem which I used to pick myself.

grandmother—plus sumac with a hint of salt. These are ground together with toasted sesame seeds added on top. Another common purchase is a blend simply referred to as seven spice, which is familiar to every Palestinian cook. This consists of ground allspice, black pepper, coriander, cumin, nutmeg, with cinnamon or cardamom. Tawfik grinds all of these every day so that customers can make their own mix rich in flavour.

My favourite shelf in the shop bears the ingredients that were used in Palestinian cuisine but are now far less popular. I love the licorice seeds that awaken more childhood memories. I used to search under the trees for the cones that they came from, so that I could crack them open and remove their tiny treasures. Licorice sticks, including frankincense, are sold here. These are still used by Bethlehemites to take to church as an offering to burn in their homes, but I sometimes use them in my cooking. I have a crème anglaise that is infused with this scent.

Tawfik is a kind man who will sometimes accompany me in my creative pursuits. When I first insisted on trying to figure out how to capture the woody, sweet, and citrusy aroma of frankincense in a dish, we decided to use the hinge of his outside metal door to burn the incense with coal under





we were not overcome by the smell in the store. Over the course of a section of Star Street was full of the scent, and we were drawing the attention of other shopkeepers. Some still like to remind us of this behaviour today.

Tawfik also sells my favourite grain, freekeh, a green durum wheat charred with the burnt outer husk rubbed off. It can be cooked like rice with a distinctive smoky flavour and a delicious al dente texture. For me, this comes from the northern West Bank. Tawfik sources his from around

Like other Bethlehemites, I might drop into the store for fala samneh (ghee) when my homemade stocks run out. There are also various ingredients that you will struggle to find elsewhere, such as loumi—limes packed with intense flavour—and dried lemons.

At festive times, the shop starts selling mahlab, the ground ar sour cherry, and mistaka (mastic). That is how I register that we are going to Easter, Christmas, Ramadan, Eid al-Adha, or Eid al-Fitr. Palestinian all of these with ka'ek (sesame bread) and ma'amoul, a mouthwatering pastry made with semolina flour and stuffed with date paste or walnuts. The feast which I especially enjoy celebrating is that of Saint Barbara on 4 and 17, observed by all the Christian denominations. This is when I toothsome, porridge-like warm dessert called burbara (page 205). V his preparations, Tawfik gives over a corner of his store to the ingredients: wheat berries, spices, sheets of dried apricot paste called kamardin, nuts, and candied anise and fennel. This has been the routine since it opened in 1936, and I find that continuity deeply reassuring.

Needless to say, when I started giving Palestinian cuisine tours, Tawfik's shop was always on the map. He offered coffee to our guests passionately about his spices. Nobody ever goes home without some sumac, freekeh, and mahlab. Some they might buy, but Tawfik can repackage up extra gifts, too. For me, he represents the essence of Palestinian hospitality. Tawfik is rightly proud of his craft and enjoys sharing the that has been passed down through generations of his family. In the

challenges from all of our social changes, he continues to sell first-ra

LOUKMET

SHISH

BARAK

DOUGH

70 g / ½ cup all-purpose
flour, plus more for
the work surface and
baking sheet

Salt

1½ teaspoons extra-virgin
olive oil, plus more for
the baking sheet

120 ml / ½ cup water

FILLING

1 tablespoon extra-virgin
olive oil

1 garlic clove, crushed

250 g / 9 ounces lamb

mince (ground lamb)

½ teaspoon salt

¼ teaspoon ground cumin

¼ teaspoon ground

allspice

1 tablespoon chopped

fresh flat-leaf parsley

TO FINISH

1 tablespoon dried mint

1½ teaspoons dried red

Shish barak are little Palestinian dumplings filled with lamb, then cooked in sauces made with laban jameed (salted yoghurt). I've played around with recipes for shish barak flavors and accompaniments, in both of my restaurants. *Loukmeh* means "mouthful" in Arabic, so I serve a serving of three little dumplings—three little bites per person—less—depending on where it is placed in a meal.

To make the dough, combine the flour, a pinch of salt, and water in a bowl. Pour in the water slowly and knead the dough for 3 minutes, until it's homogenous. Transfer the dough to a floured surface and continue kneading it for 5 to 10 minutes, until smooth.

Return the dough to a bowl, cover it with a cloth, and let it rest for about 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, make the filling. Heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the garlic, lamb, salt, cumin, and allspice and sauté until the lamb is cooked through. Decrease the heat to medium and continue to cook for 5 minutes.

Remove the pan from the heat and stir in the parsley.

To assemble the dumplings, cut the dough into four pieces. Roll out one piece on a floured sheet and a work surface.

Working with one piece of dough at a time, roll out the dough to a thickness of 3 mm. Cut out circles about 2 cm / ¾ inch in diameter with a round cutter, a cup, or a biscuit cutter. Put a spoonful of the filling in the center of the circle, fold in half to make a half-circle, then pinch it to seal it. Bring the two ends together and pinch them to form a pointed dumpling. Place it on the floured sheet. Repeat with the remaining dough and filling, spacing out the dumplings so they don't stick.

Bring a big pot of salted water to a boil over high heat. While the water is boiling, grease a baking sheet. Working in batches, boil the dumplings until they float, about 3 minutes. Scoop the dumplings out of the water and place them on the greased baking sheet.

pepper flakes
240 ml / 1 cup vegetable
oil, for frying
120 g / ½ cup thick
yoghurt (Greek yogurt)
2 garlic cloves, crushed
Salt
1 tablespoon toasted
pine nuts

MAKES 20 TO 22
DUMPLINGS

slotted spoon and transfer them to the greased sheet.
In a small ramekin, make a mix of the dried mint and red
by one, dip the dumplings in the herbs to cover all the sides.
In a small frying pan, heat the vegetable oil to 180°C / 350°F.
Quickly fry the coated dumplings for a minute, using a slotted spoon.
they are fried on all sides. Drain on paper towels.
Combine the yoghurt and garlic with a pinch of salt in a bowl.
To serve, put a small circle of the garlic yoghurt on each dumpling.
dumplings on the yoghurt and sprinkle the toasted pine nuts.







LENTIL SOUP

WITH MAMA

MICHELINE

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BETH KORN

There is no way to choose an absolute favourite from among all the delic that my mother has cooked for me throughout my life. She has a fantasti range—naturally most are Palestinian dishes, but she excels at some forei ones, too. My parents would often entertain guests when I was growing u and I would hear French, English, and Arabic spoken around the overflow dining table. I liked the way that traditional Palestinian foods, such as kou

mahshi—stuffed courgettes (zucchini), kibbeh (spiced ground meat coate bulgur wheat and fried), or shish barak (meat dumplings)—were served ne international ones, such as my maternal grandmother’s sweet glazed carr

Like my brother and sister, I grew up munching on Mama’s succule mahshi—stuffed vegetables, rolled grape leaves, and rolled cabbage. She in making these to such an extent that when Jamie Oliver visited Palestin wanted to learn how to make vegetarian versions, I had no choice but to him over to Mama Micheline.

A mild shrimp curry remains a trademark dish of my mother’s. She how to make it from her mother-in-law, Emily, who also happened to be aunt, and had been influenced and inspired by Indian cuisine while living

Bombay. In my opinion, my mother also makes the juiciest barbecued fill beef that I have ever tasted anywhere. But then there is her humble lentil which makes me salivate just thinking of it. It is warm and comforting and quintessentially tastes of home.

A spoonful of Mama's lentil soup is creamy with a kick of ginger. It is perfect with a drop of freshly squeezed lemon and her crispy croutons. This combination creates a fabulous fragrance and texture. The soup is commonly made and served in winter. Coming home from school on a chilly day, I usually relish a bowl with spinach pastries on the side. To the outrage of my mother, I liked to dip the pastries into the lentil soup, enjoying the contrasting flavors.

The apparent simplicity of the soup is deceptive, as proven by me. I have never been able to perfect it or lay my hands on Mama's definition. If I ask her how to recreate it, she gives me a detailed account but omits a key point. She claims that each time she makes the soup, she changes it slightly. This may be true, but I suspect that she confuses me on purpose to keep the recipe secret and me in my place.

When I first opened my restaurant Fawda in Bethlehem, I made an attempt at cooking Mama's lentil soup. However it was never quite like hers. Sensing my frustration, she made a huge pot of the soup at home and it delivered to me. This provides an idea of the relationship that my mother has around food. Usually, I ask for her recipes, and she asks laughingly if I will deconstruct or twist them. In return, I always share my plans and she gives her opinions and advice.

My mother has greatly influenced my cooking both as an amateur and a professional. She is always nurturing me. To this day, whenever we are in Bethlehem, I tend to call her early in the morning to talk about our plans. If I am busy, she will always kindly ask, "What do you want me to cook for you?" She knows my favourite dishes as well as she knows me; after all, she has been feeding my palate with the love of a mother. This applied even when we were overseas—usually on trips to Europe—and she would help me choose a restaurant. My mother has an appreciation of fine dining that she has passed on to me. From a very young age, I was privileged to be able to dine in some of the world's best restaurants.

However, we did sometimes end up in awful places to eat, too. It was a family's habit to rent a car, particularly while visiting France. My father would drive and, as the oldest child, I would sit in the passenger's seat with him, giving directions as we went off exploring the countryside. Mama would sit in the back with my siblings, poring over the Michelin Guide for our next stop. The method was hit-or-miss, but it ensured that food memories were made during all our travels.

We spent the majority of time in Paris, where Mama would take

opened restaurants or traditional brasseries that she enjoyed. Through exposure to so many different cuisines and flavours that later I felt encouraged to experiment with tastes and textures in order to reinterpret Palestinian dishes and come up with my own modern takes.

But still I come back to my mother's lentil soup—her delicious version of the traditional kind you find in Palestine. Like her chocolate mousses, loved by our extended family, it's a dish I have been striving to make since I was a child, never getting it a hundred percent right. My mother's unpretentious style is on full display in these dishes. They are reminders that makes her an exceptional cook.

LENTIL SOUP

380 g / 13 ounces red
lentils
4 tablespoons extra-virgin
olive oil
2 onions, finely chopped
3 garlic cloves, crushed
2 teaspoons ground
turmeric
2 teaspoons ground cumin
1 teaspoon ground ginger
500 ml / 2 $\frac{1}{8}$ cups chicken
stock or water
Juice of 2 lemons
2 flatbreads, such as pita,
kmaj, or shrak
Green Shatta (page 76)

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BETHLEHEM

My mother cooks *shorbat adas*, a lentil soup, when the wind gets chilly in Bethlehem, and often in the days regarded as the healthy option to many a fast and a fortunate, shorbat adas is in reality the noblest of soup of fresh accompaniments: Palestinian finely chopped spring onions, and fried bread.

Combine the lentils with cold water to cover in a bowl.

In a large pot, heat 2 tablespoons of the olive oil over medium heat. Add the onions and sauté for 2 minutes. Add the garlic, turmeric, and ginger and continue to sauté until the onions become translucent, 3 minutes.

Drain the lentils and add to the pot. Cover with the stock and heat to medium. Cover and cook for 20 minutes, until the lentils are tender.

Add the lemon juice and blend with a handheld blender until smooth.

In a small pan, heat the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil over medium heat. Cut the bread into strips and briefly fry in the hot oil until browned and crisp.

Serve the soup with fried bread on top and a dash of shatta.

SERVES 6

MAFTOUL

SALAD

2 tablespoons extra-virgin
olive oil
1 onion, very finely
chopped
250 g / 1½ cups maftoul
½ teaspoon salt
600 ml / 2½ cups water
¼ bunch flat-leaf parsley,
leaves only
¼ bunch mint, leaves only
1 teaspoon dried marjoram
Juice of 1 lemon
150 g / ⅔ cup sun-dried
tomatoes in oil
110 g / ⅓ cup cooked
chickpeas, homemade
or store-bought
2 tablespoons toasted
almond slivers
1 teaspoon ground sumac

SERVES 6

Maftoul is a Palestinian delicacy, the han symbolizing the attachment to wheat tha Palestinians still grow wheat despite the the occupation forces. Maftoul is a celeb prepared with chicken or meat and chick family gatherings. However, it's also a fant: maftoul is one of my favorite ingredients. " flavorful, and fresh; it reflects a lot of Pales it is called marma'on, and that name has su faraway places like Chile, where there are r origin, originally from Bethlehem, who hav their names while adapting the recipes.

In a large pot, heat 1 tablespoon of the olive o the onion and sauté until translucent, 3 to 5 m stir until all the grains are well coated. Add the uncovered, for about 15 minutes, until the ma water and is tender.

Remove the pot from the heat, cover, and set transfer onto a tray and fluff the maftoul with cools down.

In the meantime, make the dressing. Put half t in a blender with the marjoram, the remaining lemon juice and process until smooth.

Coarsely chop the remaining parsley and mint into thin strips, and, with your hand, separate

Plate the maftoul, drizzle the dressing over, ar chopped parsley and mint, and chickpeas. Spr on top, and serve.

SILEK

SALAD

3 tablespoons extra-virgin
olive oil
1 onion, finely chopped
3 garlic cloves, crushed
2 bunches of silek (chard),
stalks and leaves
separated and finely
chopped
½ teaspoon coarse sea
salt
Juice of 1 lemon
½ teaspoon ground sumac

Silek is chard (also called silverbeet), a green that you can find and eaten all over Palestine, and cooked in many dishes. In Gaza, it is used to make sumaqkiyeh, a stew with silverbeet and tahinia. Many Palestinian cooks stuff it like grape leaves. It is a healthy, vibrant green, and tasty salad that is a staple in the kitchen when silek is in season. In its simplicity, it celebrates our extra-virgin olive oil.

Heat the oil in a large pot over medium heat. Add the onion and sauté until softened, about 5 minutes. Add the silek stalks and cook for 3 minutes, until softened. Add the leaves, stir well, add the oil, and cook for another 2 to 3 minutes, until the stalks are golden and the leaves are but still green. Decrease the heat, stir, and cook for another 2 to 3 minutes until the leaves are tender.

Remove from the heat. Add the lemon juice and sumac and serve in a bowl, either warm or cold.



AUTUMN

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OLIVE OIL WITH ABU MOHAMMAD IN SEBASTIA

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BETH HICKEY

Sebastia is a tiny hilltop village in the northern West Bank. Dating back to the Iron Age, it is thought to be one of the oldest continuously inhabited places in Palestine. All of the civilisations that took over this region settled in Sebastia. For a time, I would come as a tour guide, recounting for tourists how Saladin said to have danced here for Herod Antipas and then asked for the head of the Baptist on a platter. We would look around what is believed to be the tomb of St. John—in the remnants of a Crusader church at one end of the Nabulsi Mosque. But the antiquities are not the main reason I keep returning to Sebastia. I come back to see my dear friend Abu Mohammad, and for his delicious musakhan and the olive oil.

I met Abu Mohammad, a restaurant owner, on one of my first visits to Sebastia. He is known locally for his fantastic musakhan, an emblematic Palestinian dish, sometimes called our national dish. It is created with a dark flatbread and soft onion confit coated in purple sumac and glistening olive oil, all crowned with roasted chicken. As well as being a formidable cook, Abu Mohammad is an impressive character who embodies the steadfast spirit of the village, the generosity and hospitality of Palestine, and its openness towards the world.

world. Before Israel's occupation forces shut down the roads leading to S during the Second Intifada, his restaurant was constantly busy, welcoming pilgrims and travellers crossing from north to south. Even after the route reopened, business has never quite returned to how it was.

Whenever I plan to visit Sebastia or the bustling nearby city of Nal always wary of telling Abu Mohammad. There is no such thing as a snack him, nor even a meal, only a feast. He will invite me and any guests I bring meet him to have musakhan, but he always includes other dishes, too, knowing each is a favourite of mine and that I will find it impossible to resist. He will often start with a humble, earthy freekeh soup before adding a makhoul





classic upside-down rice dish that includes slow-cooked cubes of lamb with aubergine (eggplant) or cauliflower—whichever is in season. Then there is a stuffed lamb leg with the musakhan (roast chicken) served in the middle when we are congratulating ourselves for devouring such a huge banquet. Mohammad will smile and produce an irresistible tray of warm, sweet Nazknafeh, a dessert with a shredded filo dough crust and a sweet cheese filling topped with a rose water syrup.

Knowing Abu Mohammad as I do, I always take my stroll around S after greeting him but before sitting down at his overflowing table. Walk along the stones of ancient roads and among the crumbling walls and brick pillars poking through the green grass, I feel transported back through centuries. For me, the scenery represents the resilience of nature through past invasions and conflicts. There are olive trees spread among the ruins, or more accurately, there are ruins spread among the olive trees. Some of these Palestinian towns date back to Roman times. They have stood as witnesses to so much change; they represent constancy, too—the annual cycle of growth and harvesting, which has instilled itself into Palestinian traditions and cuisine.

Olive oil is a staple in Palestine, but there are variations in how it is used. In the south of Palestine, we tend to use samneh (ghee) and olive oil differently from in the northern West Bank. In the north, there is more agricultural land available for the production of olive oil, and there are more Bedouin who traditionally produce the sheep milk used to make sarlab. Abu Mohammad, like other Palestinians from around Nablus and Jenin, uses olive oil routinely in cooking. He will fry eggs, dough, or cauliflower in olive oil.

A few years ago, I was filming an episode of my show, *Sebastia* during the olive harvest season, which is always a joyful celebration. At the olive press, I had the pleasure of tasting the freshly pressed oil, which has a particular sharpness and spiciness to it that lessens with time. There is also a sense of achievement as families arrive at the press after days of hard work and teamwork picking these tiny fruits, grown on their trees on their land that have been for generations. At the press, I was touched by the kindness of the women of freshly pressed olive oil by the woman who bakes the delicious *musakhan* used locally for *musakhan*. She had a sparkle in her eyes.

I must have been caught up in the excitement of the olive harvest. I do not think Abu Mohammad had ever seen anybody use as much olive oil as I did that day when we were making *musakhan* together on camera. I was pouring the oil onto the edges of the bread and sprinkling it over the bread that is soaked in chicken broth—I dipped the whole loaf into the oil, satisfied. It seems Abu Mohammad was easily converted to the process, however. Later, when I was invited over for *musakhan*, I was surprised to see that he had begun dunking the bread into the oil, too.

The olive tree is often used as a symbol of Palestinian resilience and connection to the land, and olive oil is tied up with our national identity. For hundreds of years, a national tradition has built up around the harvest. In every village and city hosting its own festival at harvest time, often with stalls selling local produce. Of course, there is also fierce competition among Palestinians over olive oil production. While we may accept that different places are famous for different produce—for example, Beit Jala is known for its olive oil,

mishmish (apricots), and ennab, or jujube fruits, grow well in Ennab Sebastia—we vigorously dispute the source of the finest olive oil.

With Abu Mohammad, I've enjoyed our ongoing banter about olive oil from Bethlehem or Sebastia is the best. However, after years I've decided to give up and just enjoy tasting and comparing the olive oil from different places across the country whenever I get the chance.

FUKHARA

POT ROAST

400 g / 14 ounces pork
shoulder, cut into four
equal pieces

400 g / 14 ounces beef
shoulder, cut into four
equal pieces

400 g / 14 ounces lamb
shoulder, cut into four
equal pieces

200 g / 7 ounces onions

4 garlic cloves

2 bay leaves

3 tablespoons coarse
sea salt

6 sprigs parsley

3 sprigs zaatar (or
substitute 1 tablespoon
dry zaatar leaves)

60 ml / ¼ cup extra-virgin
olive oil

40 g / ⅓ cup toasted
pine nuts

40 g / ⅓ cup toasted
almonds

About 200 ml / ¾ cup
plus 2 tablespoons
water, or more as
needed



The *fukhara* is a clay pot that is used in Palestine traditionally filled with chicken or meat and vegetables for hours in a wood-fired oven. I personally find that they lose their taste after a slow cook with meat in a sea. I started experimenting with cooking the meat and vegetables separately. I tried out different meats available in the market until I came up with this delicious recipe.

Preheat the oven to 180°C / 350°F.

In a large bowl, mix together the meats, onions, garlic, bay salt, parsley, zaatar, olive oil, pine nuts, and almonds. Transfer to a food-grade clay pot or a Dutch oven. Add the water to the meat.

To make the dough seal, mix the flour and the water until it is thick. On a floured work surface, roll out the dough to make a seal on the inside edge of the cooking pot. Then place the cover on the pot.

Bake for 3½ hours. Break the dough seal to check if the meat is tender.

Strain the cooking juices into a small pot and place it over a low flame. Boil, checking constantly, until the juice thickens. Add salt to taste.

To serve, place a piece of each of the three meats in each bowl with some cooked vegetables of your choice, and drizzle the thickened cooking juices over the top.

DOUGH SEAL

400 g / 3¹/₃ cups all-
purpose flour, plus
more for the work
surface

5 to 6 teaspoons water

Salt and ground black
pepper

SERVES 4





ROASTED BONE MARROW

1.3 kg / 2¾ pounds beef
marrow bones, cut
lengthwise
30 g / ¾ cup fresh zaatar
leaves
15 g / ⅓ cup flat-leaf
parsley leaves
1 teaspoon coarse sea salt
1 teaspoon cracked black
pepper
½ teaspoon ground sumac
¼ teaspoon coriander
seeds
1 teaspoon fresh lemon
juice
1 garlic clove, crushed
Ka'ek al-quds (see page
72) or toasted pita
bread

SERVES 6

Bone marrow isn't traditionally served on cuisine. However, many of our recipes—f roasted lamb—involve cooking the meat v grandmother used to always give me the l some of these dishes. In Arabic we call it As child I assumed it was called that beca brain. But I loved the texture and apprec way the meat was cooked, the texture of 1 different. Much later in life, while in Frar beef bones with bone marrow, and I realis into the secret of bone marrow very youn roasted bone marrow recipe with a Palest

Preheat the oven to 220°C / 425°F.

Place the bones marrow-side up on a baking sl 20 minutes, until the bone marrow starts bubb

Meanwhile, reserve a few leaves of zaatar and mixing bowl, combine the rest of the zaatar an sumac, coriander seeds, lemon juice, and garlic

When the bones are ready, drizzle the fragrant the sides and serve with the bread on the side.

QUINCE JAM

500 g / 2½ cups sugar
230 ml / 1 cup water
1 kg / 2⅛ pounds quince
10 g / 7½ teaspoons
ground mastic
2 lemons, 1 chopped and
1 juiced

MAKES FIVE 250 ML /
1-CUP JARS

Quince, or *safarjal*, jam is another one of my childhood favorites. My grandmother used to make it, and nowadays my mother makes it, too. It is a seasonal jam that I prepare and sell at our boutique guesthouse, Hosh Al-Syrian, for a generation. Quince is an underappreciated fruit. It reminds me of winter with its beautiful pinkish colour.

Sterilize the canning jars. Place a plate in the freezer for a reference consistency of the jam. Have ready a piece of muslin or cloth.

Fill the bottom of a double boiler with water and place over the top of the double boiler, mix the sugar and water and heat. Decrease the heat to medium-high and cook for about 10 minutes until it forms a syrup.

Core the centers of the quince but don't peel them. Place the cores, mastic, and chopped lemon on the muslin. Tie the muslin to form a bag and slide it into the sugar syrup. Add the quince.

Decrease the heat to low. Chop the quince and add to the syrup. You add the quince pieces immediately after chopping; otherwise they oxidize and turn brown.

Increase the heat to medium and allow the quince to boil while stirring with a wooden spoon, until the jam thickens. Test the jam on the chilled plate to check the consistency. If you push a finger in the middle of the jam and it leaves a mark, the jam is done. If it is still liquid and slides around, then you have to boil it for longer.

Once the jam is ready, pour it into the jars, seal, and leave in the kitchen until they cool down. Enjoy quince jam for the rest of the year.



AUTUMN

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POACHED PEACHES IN POME- GRANATE JUICE

300 g / 1½ cups sugar
360 ml / 1½ cups water
175 ml / ¾ cup
pomegranate juice
5 lavender flowers (the
tips of the lavender
sprigs)^N
6 ripe peaches

SERVES 6

Peaches have a quite short season in Palestine. I think they go very well with a lot of desserts (page 117). These peaches are poached in pomegranate juice with lavender. I usually pick the lavender from my garden, and I get local peaches from Um

In a saucepan, combine the sugar, water, and pomegranate juice. Heat over medium heat and stir for 3 to 4 minutes until the sugar

Turn the heat to high to let the mixture boil, and then turn the heat to medium and add the lavender flowers.

With the tip of a knife, score an X at the base of each peach. Add the peaches to the saucepan, cover, and leave to cook for 8 to 10 minutes until the peaches are tender but still firm.

Meanwhile, prepare an ice bath with a bowl of ice and water. Using a spider or slotted spoon, remove the peaches from the saucepan and put them in the ice bath. Take them out of the ice bath when they are cold. Drain. You can either remove the skin of the peaches or keep them on. Store the peaches in the refrigerator.

¹⁷¹ Place the saucepan with the syrup over medium heat and cook for 8 to 10 minutes, until it forms a very thick syrup.

Pour the syrup over the peaches and store in the refrigerator. Otherwise they will become mushy. Serve the peaches plain or alongside another dessert.





GRAND LUNCHEONS

WITH SIDO

NAKHLEH

So many of our memories are intertwined with food. There are evocative tastes and smells, but the reminders of past meals and gatherings are also conjured by the plates, cutlery, furniture, and spaces we use. Most importantly, of course, are the family and friends who created the dishes and brought us together.

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BETHLEHEM

My paternal grandfather, Nakhleh, loved good food and enjoyed nothing more than entertaining us with a grand family lunch. I am now privileged to live in his home and can easily transport myself back to the old days, when my grandfather, his sister Maria, his niece Victoria and cousin Regina would gather to receive their guests. They would set out the silver cutlery that I continue to use, on the same wooden dining table, in the same *liwan*, or long room. My grandfather was a tall gentleman whose gait I am reliably informed I have inherited by those who remember him strolling around Bethlehem City. He was gentle and generous and loved to serve up stories of his childhood and global travels with each dish as he sat at the head of the table. Maria, Victoria, and Regina were in their seventies and eighties, and were typical Bethlehemites. Despite the fact that all three wore a solemn black as a kind of dress code, they were all remarkably fun.

A meal with Sido Nakhleh was always a feast of regal proportions. a food lover, I cherished these occasions. One Palestinian delicacy that w be invited over to enjoy was stuffed lamb's intestines and tripe—the stom lining. No longer so popular today, the offal would be well cleaned, cut in pieces, and stuffed with rice, meat, and chickpeas, then cooked in a yogh sauce. Rolled grape leaves filled with rice would be served on the side. I r every mouthful.

There was also the excitement of variation and the unexpected wit Nakhleh. The cuisine at his home reflected the many regions that he and relatives had visited and resided in over the years. My grandparents lived

Japan and India, where my father was born, giving him a lifelong love of Japanese and Indian food. There were also influences from places where Sido's brothers and sisters moved to: Chile, Sudan, the UK, and Italy. Popular lunch dishes might be a mouthwatering spinach cannelloni or an escalope milanaise.

Once we arrived, Sido Nakhleh would guide us children toward the dining table. Even in his later years, when he was in a wheelchair, he remained an exemplary host, a soft and gentle presence. There was the joy of exquisite tastes but also absorbing the side conversations sparked by stories revolving around our daily lives.

Sido loved to expose us to exotic flavours, so if he could find a custard apple—he would cut it open and serve us each a small piece with a spoon. My favourite fruit as a child was mango. Its appearance was made extra special by the fact that it would mark the only time grandfather would allow us to make a mess. I remember his expert instruction on how to slice the sweet flesh and remove the large seed. However, it was agreed that the best way to avoid wasting any of the delicious pulp was to use your hands and suck it from the seed. This would always leave us all with sticky and terribly sticky hands.

AUTUMN

Dessert, whatever it might be, was always followed by Arabic coffee and liwan and more of Sido's tales of past trips and exciting experiences.

Of all the children I was the only one allowed in Sido's pantry. It was turned, perhaps appropriately enough, into my study. This is where supplies were stored in the dark, away from the damaging effects of light. For me, it was like a treasure trove: filled with jams, olive oil, dried rice (jute leaves), tomatoes, and pickled olives. Preserving fruits and vegetables when they were in season ensured that they could remain wondrously available all year round. The smell has faded now, but when I was a boy this rich and distinctive smell of molokhia was everywhere.

Despite the availability of frozen molokhia in the market today, my grandfather used to dry molokhia leaves during the summer and storing it dried, just as he dried and stored in my grandfather's pantry. I believe the taste is constant.

different. As with many other people in the Arab world, the dish is a favourite that has stuck with me.

After my grandmother died, Sido's sister, niece, and cousin took over the grocery shopping and preparing our feasts for the most part. His neighbour, a fantastic woman called Khadra, would sometimes come. Originally from a Bedouin tribe just outside Bethlehem, Khadra had a look with a tattooed forehead and chin. At the time, these facial tattoos were common. But they have since disappeared in Palestine just like dried

Nowadays, years after my grandfather and his household have left, there are so many questions I would like to ask them. Having read through some neatly filed documents in the Kattan family archive, I can appreciate far more what courage Sido Nakhleh and his brothers had, travelling the world to make their fortunes in the early twentieth century, towards the end of the Ottoman era. The name, Kattan, is Arabic for “cotton”, and they ventured out to establish their trade in textiles. However, from this branch of my family only Sido and my grandmother, Emily, were to return to Palestine, in 1954.

They came back to dramatic change as a result of the 1948 Nakba (catastrophe), which saw more than 750,000 Palestinians displaced from their homes by the creation of the state of Israel, and the resulting violence and displacement. While the family home in Bethlehem remained safe, there were huge losses of investments and properties. The Nakba ensured that most family members who had already settled overseas did not return. Through his letters and stories, I can appreciate how much nostalgia my grandfather had for his early life and his siblings. There was also the terrible hole left by the early death of his wife.

The archive has many handwritten letters by Sido Nakhleh to my grandmother, Teta Emily, or El-Mimi, as he called her. The love they had for each other was something precious as they set out on international adventures and then came home to Bethlehem to face struggles and hardship. It impacts me more as an adult to remember how even in his final years, my grandfather remained an optimistic and cheerful person.

Yet he must always have wondered if events could have turned out differently. One poignant keepsake from my grandfather is a beautiful postcard of Bombay from 1947. He and my grandmother were evidently out celebrating on the night of India's independence. On the back of the postcard there are messages written by friends who were with them, expressing their wishes and hopes for the independence of Palestine as well.





CAULIFLOWER MAKLOUBEH

CHICKEN

2 teaspoons ground allspice
1 teaspoon ground turmeric
1 teaspoon ground coriander
½ teaspoon ground
cinnamon
2 teaspoons salt
1 teaspoon ground black
pepper
1 whole chicken, about 1¾ kg
/ 4 pounds
2 tablespoons extra-virgin
olive oil
1 onion, halved
2 bay leaves

CAULIFLOWER

300 ml / 1¼ cups
vegetable oil
1 large cauliflower, cut
into florets

RICE

720 g / 4 cups basmati rice
1 teaspoon ground allspice
½ teaspoon ground coriander
¼ teaspoon ground turmeric
¼ teaspoon ground
cinnamon
1 tablespoon olive oil

Makloubeh is one of the national dishes of Egypt, and different regions make makloubeh differently. There are two types: aubergine (eggplant) makloubeh and chicken makloubeh with chicken. Both types are common at home, we tend to make aubergine makloubeh. My mother dislikes cauliflower. Makloubeh translates to "upside down". It goes that the name was created by Salah al-Din, former Sultan of Egypt. While visiting Palestine, he flipped the pot upside down onto the ground. From that name, he used the term *makloubeh*, which has been known ever since.

To prepare the chicken, combine the allspice, salt, and pepper. Rub the mix into the chicken.

In a pot large enough to fit the whole chicken, add water on high heat. Add the onion and sear. Add the chicken and bay leaves. When the water comes to a boil, reduce the heat and simmer for 45 to 60 minutes, until the chicken is cooked.

To prepare the cauliflower, fill a deep frying pan with oil and heat it over medium-high heat to 180°C / 350°F. Fry the cauliflower florets until they're golden, 2 to 3 minutes. Remove with a spider or slotted spoon and drain on a paper towel.

Remove the chicken from the broth. Strain the broth into a bowl. Add salt and pepper to taste. Cut the chicken into pieces.

To prepare the rice, rinse the rice in cold water until the water is clear. Place in a bowl, and add the spices to it, mix well.

Pour the olive oil into a large pot. Layer the cauliflower on the bottom. Layer the chicken pieces on top with the fried cauliflower in a layer, then add the broth until the rice is covered. If the broth dries up, add more. Cover the pot.

2 tomatoes, sliced

2 onions, sliced

Water, as needed

GARNISH (OPTIONAL)

2 tablespoons whole almonds

2 tablespoons pine nuts

SERVES 6 TO 8

Bring the broth to a boil, then decrease the heat to a simmer for about 45 minutes, until the rice is cooked. Turn off the heat and let the steam to finish the cooking, about 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, to prepare the garnish if using, toast the almonds and pine nuts in a dry pan over medium heat for about 3 minutes. Stir frequently for another minute, stirring. Do not allow the nuts to burn.

To serve, remove the pot lid. Cover the pot with a clean kitchen towel upside down. Tap the bottom of the pot with a wooden spoon for 5 minutes to make sure that the makloubeh is firm. Lift the pot; you should have a perfect mound of makloubeh. Sprinkle the toasted almonds and pine nuts on top.

THE PERFECT GRILLED TRIO

In Palestinian culture, we often enjoy a barbecue. C evenings, driving through villages and towns, we ar smells of grilled meats and vegetables. When Palest out to eat, it is rarely for home-style food. Instead, grilled meats—and each area has its well-known eat a variety of salads. They can be small hole-in-the-w large established restaurants. My preferred grilled t kababs, lamb chops, and lamb kababs. Some peopl should include diced lamb or different cuts of chick are my core favorites.

For all the kababs, I prefer using metal skewer using wooden ones, be sure to soak them in water 1 before using.

CHICKEN KABABS

2 onions, finely chopped
5 garlic cloves, finely
chopped
20 g / ½ cup fresh flat-
leaf parsley, finely
chopped
20 g / ½ cup fresh zaatar
leaves, finely chopped
225 g / 1 cup yoghurt
60 ml / ¼ cup fresh
lemon juice
60 ml / ¼ cup
vegetable oil
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon ground black
pepper
¼ teaspoon ground
cardamom
¼ teaspoon ground

LAMB CHOPS

4 garlic cloves, very finely
chopped
120 ml / ½ cup extra-
virgin olive oil
1 tablespoon fresh
lemon juice
1 tablespoon ground black
pepper
2 teaspoons ground sumac
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon ground
coriander
½ teaspoon ground
cardamom
½ teaspoon ground
cinnamon
½ teaspoon ground
nutmeg
Salt

LAMB KABABS

750 g / 1½ pound
mince (ground)
1 onion, finely ch
2 garlic cloves, fi
chopped
1 parsley sprig, fi
chopped
1 teaspoon groun
½ teaspoon grou
nutmeg
½ teaspoon grou
cardamom
½ teaspoon grou
Salt and ground
pepper

SERVES 6

cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon ground
allspice
1 kg / 2 1/4 pounds
boneless, skinless
chicken breasts, cut
into bite-size cubes

12 bone-in lamb rib chops

CONTINUED ON



THE PERFECT GRILLED TRIO, continued

To prepare the chicken kababs, combine the onions, garlic, yoghurt, lemon juice, vegetable oil, salt, pepper, cardamom, and allspice in a bowl. Add the chicken and mix until the chicken is coated. Cover and marinate in the refrigerator for 4 to 8 hours. Thread the chicken onto skewers, leaving the tops and the bottoms of the skewers empty to place them on the barbecue.

To prepare the lamb chops, combine the garlic, olive oil, lemon juice, sumac, cumin, coriander, cardamom, cinnamon, and nutmeg in a bowl. Season with salt and mix together. Add the lamb chops, toss to coat, and marinate in the refrigerator for 4 to 8 hours.

To prepare the lamb kababs, combine the lamb mince in a bowl with onion, garlic, parsley, allspice, nutmeg, cardamom, and cumin. Season with salt and pepper. Use your hands to mix until everything is well combined. In the palm of your hand, form the meat into oval patties 1½ inches thick. Thread the patties onto skewers, leaving the tops and bottoms of the skewers empty to place them on the barbecue. While you prepare the rest of the meal.

Prepare your charcoal or gas barbecue for medium-high heat. Place the skewers over the hotter side of the barbecue for about 3 minutes. Then move them to the lower-heat side of the barbecue and let them cook through on the other side.

Start with the chicken skewers. Place them over the hotter side of the barbecue first. Cook for 5 minutes on each side, for a total of 10 minutes. Then move them to the lower-heat side of the barbecue and let them cook for another 1 to 2 minutes to cook completely.

Place the lamb chops over the hotter side for about 3 minutes. Then move them to the lower-heat side of the barbecue and let them cook for 1 to 2 minutes. It's possible to leave them for 3 to 4 minutes on low heat if you prefer them cooked more. Allow them to rest for 5 minutes before serving.

Place the lamb kababs over the hotter side for 4 minutes. Then move them to the lower-heat side of the barbecue and let them cook for a total of 8 minutes. Then move them to the lower-heat side of the barbecue and leave them over low heat for 1 to 2 minutes, depending on the doneness you prefer for the meat. *Sahtain !*

MUSAKHAN- INSPIRED CHICKEN LIVER PÂTÉ

PÂTÉ

60 ml / ¼ cup extra-virgin
olive oil
300 g / 10 ounces chicken
liver
60 g / ¼ cup unsalted
butter
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon ground sumac
¼ teaspoon freshly
ground black pepper
2 tablespoons fresh
lemon juice

ONION JAM

60 ml / ¼ cup extra-virgin
olive oil, plus more to
sprinkle
3 large onions, diced
100 g / ½ cup sugar
1 tablespoon ground
sumac, plus more to
sprinkle
90 ml / ¾ cup white

This was maybe my first experimental take. I got inspiration from a very traditional Palestinian dish, it became a chicken liver pâté. I kept the textures of the components, but it still has the sumac, onions, and taboun bread. I think you can play around with it and make it into bite-sized portions to be served as a starter around mezze. It's a Palestinian dish.

To make the pâté, in a large frying pan, heat the oil on medium heat. Add the liver and sauté until cooked through, about 3 to 5 minutes. Scrape into the bowl of a food processor. Add the butter, salt, sumac, pepper, and lemon juice. Blend ingredients until they are well blended.

Transfer the mixture to a sheet of parchment paper that is 1½ inches thick, and tie the parchment paper into a bundle. Roll it in cheesecloth and place in the fridge overnight.

To make the onion jam, heat the olive oil in a large pot on medium heat. Add the onions and sauté until they're golden brown, about 15 minutes. Decrease the heat, add the sugar and salt. Cook for 5 to 6 minutes, until the sugar has melted. When the onion is caramelised, another 5 minutes. Decrease the heat, add the vinegar, and stir the mixture until it has thickened. Add salt and let it cool. Once it's warm, transfer the jam to a jar. When the jam is at room temperature, seal the jar and keep it in the fridge until the pâté is ready.

To serve, place the bread on a serving plate. Slice the bread. Place a bit of onion jam on the sides of the bread. Place a bit of sumac and a bit of olive oil on the plate.

balsamic vinegar
1 pinch of salt

TO FINISH

Taboun bread
Ground sumac
Olive oil

SERVES 6





THE BETHLEHEM ARAB WOMEN'S UNION

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BETHLEHEM

The Bethlehem Arab Women's Union (AWU) touches many aspects of my life. My grandmother, Julia Kattan Dabdoub, was one of the founders in 1947; it was set up as a first aid centre for those who were forcibly displaced during the Nakba, the "catastrophe" that came with the creation of the state of Israel. In 1948, more than 700,000 Palestinians had lost their homes and land and were displaced up in the West Bank, Gaza, and neighbouring countries: Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. My grandmother and her friends tried to provide small-scale help and support in the midst of the misery.

Located in the Old City, over the years, the union continued its charitable work and soon became a cultural and social hub, too. It promoted progressive values and had the first public mixed-gender swimming pool, the first library and the first art school in Bethlehem. It continues to run an ethnographic museum and also an embroidery project and a kitchen that preserves Palestinian traditions while helping local women find an income. To this day, it organizes lunches for senior citizens and activities for vulnerable children.

The AWU was so central to my grandmother's daily life that growing up it was also part of mine. Of course, the food production was my favorite

part. I loved to watch the different women coming together—some from Bethlehemite families, others from the refugee community and from surri villages, their different backgrounds bringing different touches to the recipes. As I discovered when I filmed my show, *Teta's Kitchen*, there is no spark a lively debate among Palestinians than by trying to discern the correct method to make a favourite dish.

Even now, the AWU makes delicious savoury pastries: spinach pies; khobz bi sabanekh, which have a distinctive, slightly sour taste; sambous are semi-circular with thick crusts and filled with meat or cheese; and sfi round fluffy flatbreads filled with a spiced meat flavoured with tahinia. T

have an olive oil-based sweetbread called farayek which is topped with seeds and often eaten during Lent when many Christians forgo dairy. The wonderful aroma, which fills the building. Very often my family and different pastries fresh or frozen for party food and snacks.

Many of the activities of the AWU take place in its large center. These introduced me to important Palestinian artistic and political figures. I remember being recruited on one occasion to help Teta Julia install a display for the esteemed Palestinian artist and anthropologist Ali Qleibo. A not long after what we believed at the time was a breakthrough Oslo agreement, the space was rented out by a politician named Salah Tamari, an icon of the Palestinian resistance. He had been freed from an Israeli prison as one of the first prisoner exchanges with the Palestinian Liberation Organization. He then went on to further his education, get married to an ex-wife of King Hussein, Princess Dina, and return to Palestine. He became governor of Bethlehem.

Every Thursday, Salah Tamari held open sessions for locals to voice their grievances on a multitude of problems from power shortages to health care infrastructure. He would invite heads of public service to help find solutions. The first time I watched one of these public sessions, when I was twenty, my cynicism must have shown through, as my grandmother teased me. Later, I got the chance to talk to the governor, taking a stroll around the city. We began talking about poetry and he began reciting T. S. Eliot's *Waste Land*. I was fascinated and hugely impressed. I promptly told my grandmother that Mr. Tamari was a great man, and she laughed merrily at my enthusiasm. She said, "That is what the Arab Women's Union does, it tries to bring people together and serve every citizen of the city."

If I want to feel close to my late grandmother or give a visitor an insight into Bethlehem, then I always go to the small ethnographic museum that my grandmother was closely involved in setting up. It is just off a short walk from Manger Square and the Nativity Church, but can

missed down a side passage. The museum, called Beituna al-Talham Bethlehem Home, was founded in 1972. Two typical old houses have been turned over to give a taste of local living in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. There is an impressive collection of black-and-white photographs and collections from people's homes—many donated. These include the costumes—exquisitely handwoven thobes (ankle-length robes worn with headaddresses), and tarboush (brimless hats like truncated cones)—int and fancy jewelry.

My favourite room of the museum is the kitchen, which has a collection of objects that I love to study. There were clearly evolutions over time



to tin and brass, before modern materials like Teflon ever came on the scene. We switched from wood fire to coal fires, to butane gas burners. At the same time, many aspects of our cuisine and our cooking methods remained steady. Ingredients such as olive oil, olives, jams, honey, and dibs (grape molasses) have clearly not changed. Then we have the same preservation techniques: how we dry okra (okra), grape leaves, molokhia (jute), garlic, and tomatoes, for example. There are some practices and devices that I would love to bring back, first among them

the use of the *namliya* which takes its name from *namla* , or ant. cube-shaped structure dangles down from a thin wire hung from the high ceiling in the kitchen and has fine-metal mesh covering each side—including a door. Before the days of refrigerators, this was how we protected from invading armies of insects.

Tracing the origin of dishes can be fascinating. Koussa mahshi and beitan jan—stuffed courgettes and aubergines (zucchini and eggplant)—a ever-popular, emblematic Palestinian dish. In Bethlehem, they were often for Sunday lunch in Christian households—they could be cored and stuff

rice and meat, with grape leaves rolled a day before—then put in a pot over a low fire to cook while the family was at Mass. However, I remember when I was young enjoying an unfamiliar version at the house of our relative and Margot Jacir. I soon realised that the vegetables had been dried before being rehydrated. In the past, before greenhouses and refrigerators brought us these vegetables almost year round, this was how we prepared them to eat out of season. The method has now disappeared from our repertoire. I tried a few times to recreate it—working on the texture and recipe.

At the AWU's Beituna al-Talhami museum, my head will always be filled with food thoughts and nostalgia as I mount the last flight of stairs to the bedroom at the top of the house: the bedroom. This is an homage to Bethlehem in the 1920s in particular, and a photograph of my grandmother, who owned many of the items here, greets you. During this time period, for my grandmother as for many other local ones, there was an interplay between Bethlehem and the wider world. Some Bethlehemite businesses had offices in London, Paris, Manchester, Santiago, and Barranquilla, Colombia. For my grandmother, the town were getting good use out of their passports embossed with "British Mandate".

AUTUMN

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This was a time of rapid change, represented in terms of people and fashion which became more influenced by Western fashions. The room has photos of the period: my grandmothers and all their sisters—one dressed as a nun—posing together, my grandmother as a child emerging from a doorway in the Nativity Church, and a small picture of both my grandmothers in a horse-drawn carriage in the orange groves of Tel Al-Rish, a suburb of Jaffa. For me, this part of the museum is full of references to my grandmother. *Lest We Forget* —lest we forget the culture, the food of Palestine, our love of Bethlehem, our brothers and sisters in the diaspora, the history and enduring beauty of life here. As her little nod to me, there is a small piece of furniture I see as I leave this room: a wooden cradle. The last occupant of this small wooden bed was me.

LOUKMET

BROCCOLI

450 g / 1 pound broccoli,
cut into 3 cm / 1¼-inch
florets
4 garlic cloves, peeled
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon dill seeds
2 teaspoons chilli-infused
olive oil (or substitute
2 teaspoons extra-
virgin olive oil and
½ teaspoon red pepper
flakes)
Juice of 1 lemon

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BETHLEHEM

SERVES 4

Broccoli, in its initial wild cabbage form, originated in the Mediterranean region before travelling with the Romans and being “engineered” by the Etruscans onwards to where you now find it in northern Europe and the United States. I was seeing a stalk of broccoli poking out from a local market stall and would wonder why this delicious vegetable did not feature in the traditional repertoire of Palestinian cuisine, until I understood that the engineered broccoli as we know it today returned here to the Mediterranean much later. Some spices and seeds are common to regional cuisines in Palestine and one of them is dill. Dill is not found in the West Bank and coastal areas, it is very common in the north.

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil and prepare an ice bath.

Add the florets to the boiling water to blanch for 1 to 2 minutes until bright green and tender-crisp. Remove from the boiling water and submerge in the ice bath for about 5 minutes, until cool. Drain.

In a mortar, crush the garlic and salt into a paste and then add the dill seeds and continue crushing.

Add the olive oil and the lemon juice. In a rotating motion, mix well into a dressing.

Serve the broccoli drizzled with the dressing and sprinkle with dill seeds on top.



AUTUMN

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FREEKEH

SALAD

90 ml / 6 tablespoons
extra-virgin olive oil
200 g / 7 ounces cracked
freekeh, rinsed and any
stones removed
1 L / 4¼ cups water
Salt
400 g / 14 ounces carrots
with tops, carrots
chopped, tops finely
chopped
500 g / 1½ pounds spring
greens, such as young
cabbage, halved and
thinly sliced
2 garlic cloves, crushed
2 tablespoons fresh lemon
juice
2 spring onions (scallions),
finely chopped
30 g / ¾ cup mint leaves,
coarsely chopped
30 g / ⅔ cup parsley
leaves, coarsely
chopped
1 teaspoon ground sumac

The charred green wheat, freekeh, has such a smoky and evocative of the earth it stems from that it is a pleasure to cook with. Traditionally used in lieu of rice, it has been a staple for generations of Palestinians since 2000 BC. There are many ways to celebrate freekeh.

Heat 1 tablespoon of the oil in a saucepan over medium heat. Add the freekeh, sauté it for 30 seconds, then add the water. Bring the water to a boil, reduce the heat to low, and simmer for 15 minutes. Remove the saucepan from the heat and let it sit for 20 minutes.

Uncover and let the freekeh cool until you are ready to use it.

Heat 1 tablespoon of the oil in a pan over medium heat. Add the carrots and sauté until they are slightly charred, 7 minutes. Remove to a bowl and set aside.

In the same pan, heat 1 tablespoon of the oil, add the greens, a sprinkle of salt, and cook until the greens are wilted, 7 minutes.

To make the dressing, in a small bowl, combine 3 tablespoons of olive oil, and the lemon juice.

Fluff the cold freekeh with a fork. Add the spritzed carrots, the wilted greens, and the chopped mint and parsley. Transfer to a serving bowl, use the carrot tops and sumac on last.

SERVES 4

Qalayet Bandoura with Poached Egg

Freekeh Risotto 198

Ejjeh (Omelette) 199

Kofta Sandwiches 200

Squash Cream Soup with Laban Jame

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Lamb Testicles with Spicy Tahinia

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Christmas Eve with Teta Julia22

Teta Julia's Christmas Cake 230

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QALAYET BANDOURA WITH POACHED EGGS

2 tablespoons extra-virgin
olive oil, plus more to
serve
1 red chilli, chopped
1 green or red chilli,
chopped
2 garlic cloves, crushed
500 g / 18 ounces
tomatoes
Coarse or kosher salt and
ground black pepper
Water (optional)
2 tablespoons white
vinegar
4 eggs
20 g / 1/2 cup chopped
fresh flat-leaf parsley
Ground sumac

SERVES 4

Qalayet bandoura is a reduced tomato stew and sometimes people crack an egg on top to add depth of flavour to the dish and brings out the best of the tomato. The poached eggs on top create an ideal texture. Some people like to remove the skin; I personally prefer keeping it on, if you wish.

In a frying pan over medium-high heat, warm 1 tablespoon of olive oil. Add the chillies and garlic and sauté for 1½ minutes until their flavors and scents. Chop the tomatoes and add to the pan. Cook for 5 minutes, until the tomatoes break down. Add a pinch of salt and pepper to taste and decrease the heat to medium-low. Cook for 5 minutes, until the tomatoes dry out.

Reduce the heat to low and cook for another 10 minutes until the sauce thickens. Add the remaining tablespoon of olive oil. Remove the pan from the heat, and cover. Divide the stew into serving bowls and keep it warm while preparing the eggs.

To poach the eggs, fill a large pot with boiling water to maintain the boiling temperature. Crack the egg into a sieve over bowl to remove the more liquid part of the egg into a small bowl.

Reduce the heat to low, add vinegar to the water in the middle.

Drop one egg into the vortex and leave to cook for 3 minutes depending on how runny you like your eggs. Remove with a slotted spoon and place on top of a mound of stew. Repeat with the other eggs.

Sprinkle parsley on top of each serving and add a pinch of sumac.

FREEKEH RISOTTO

1½ L / 6 cups vegetable
broth
A few sage leaves
1 tablespoon saffron
threads, crushed
4 tablespoons extra-virgin
olive oil
2 small onions, minced
A pinch of ground
cardamom
A pinch of ground ginger
320 g / 2 cups cracked
freekeh, rinsed and any
stones removed
240 ml / 1 cup crisp white
wine (I use Palestinian
Sauvignon Blanc)
130 g / ½ cup crumbled
baladi cheese (or
substitute feta cheese)
Coarse sea salt and freshly
ground white pepper

This recipe—a deeply earthy and creamy celebration of freekeh of the north of Palestine and the beauty of the first saw the day at Fawda in Bethlehem, then became Akub in London.

Historically freekeh was the essential grain all over in Palestine, until rice appeared and slowly replaced it. Some dishes still retain freekeh as the base; other dishes substitute rice with freekeh, to capture that smoky fragrance.

Combine the vegetable broth, sage leaves, and the saffron over medium heat.

In a larger pot, heat 3 tablespoons of the olive oil. Add the onions until soft, about 3 minutes. Stir in the cardamom and ginger and stir the mixture for 3 to 4 minutes. Add the wine and let it has evaporated.

Add 120 ml / ½ cup warm broth to the freekeh and stir until absorbed. Continue adding 120 ml / ½ cup broth in the same way, until absorbed. When the freekeh is cooked and creamy, turn off the heat and stir in the remaining 1 tablespoon of olive oil, the cheese, and pepper to taste.

EJJEH

(OMELETTE)

12 eggs
60 ml / ¼ cup heavy
cream
10 g / ¼ cup flat-leaf
parsley leaves, finely
chopped
10 g / ½ cup spinach,
chopped
5 g / ¼ cup mint, chopped
2 tablespoons fresh or
dried zaatar leaves
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon ground black
pepper
1 tablespoon all-purpose
flour
4 tablespoons extra-virgin
olive oil
1 small onion, finely
chopped

SERVES 6

Ejjeh is the Palestinian omelette; it can be made with many different ingredients. Sometimes I like to get a little bit of everything, we serve a standard ejjeh with tomato, onion, and something extra, such as seasonal fresh herbs.

Crack the eggs into a big bowl. Add the cream and salt. Add half the parsley, half the spinach, half the onion, and the salt and pepper. Whisk in the flour until all the lumps are gone.

In a frying pan, heat 2 tablespoons of the olive oil. Sauté the onion and sauté briefly. Remove from the heat. Combine with the remaining parsley, spinach, and mint.

Into the same frying pan, pour 160 ml / ⅔ cup of the egg mixture. Cook in the middle of the pan. Swirl the pan around to make a circle. Let cook for 2 to 3 minutes, until the bottom is golden. Flip one-sixth of the herb-and-onion mixture in the pan. Cook the omelette over and continue to cook for another 2 minutes.

Repeat with the rest of the egg mixture, adding 2 tablespoons olive oil to the pan each time, until all the mixture is used. Should end up with six omelettes.

KOFTA

SANDWICHES

KOFTA

600 g / 1¼ pounds beef

mince (ground beef)

400 g / 14 ounces lamb

mince (ground lamb)

1 onion, finely chopped

20 g / ½ cup flat-leaf

parsley leaves, finely
chopped

½ teaspoon ground black
pepper

½ teaspoon ground
coriander

½ teaspoon dried red
pepper flakes

½ teaspoon ground allspice

¼ teaspoon salt

¼ teaspoon ground
cinnamon

Olive oil, for brushing

TAHINIA SAUCE

140 g / ½ cup tahinia

Juice of 1 lemon

1 tablespoon extra-virgin
olive oil

2 garlic cloves, crushed

½ teaspoon salt

120 ml / ½ cup water

Kofta, shaped minced meat patties, is typically the children eat in Palestine. It is cooked in tomato sauce with rice. It's an excellent comfort food, one that whenever I need a quick and comforting home-cooked sandwiches are also a treat on the side of a barbecue. I rustle one up as an evening snack. The advantage is that you can make it either on a barbecue or in a

To make the kofta, line a baking sheet with parchment

In a bowl, mix the beef, lamb, onion, parsley, pepper, coriander, allspice, salt, and cinnamon until well-blended. By hand, form the meat into oval patties about 4 cm / 1½ inches thick. You should have around 20 patties. If you are grilling them on metal skewers, leaving the tops and bottoms of the skewers open, place them on the barbecue. Once they are shaped, place them on the prepared sheet and refrigerate for 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, if you are going to barbecue them, prepare the barbecue for medium-high heat.

While the kofta chill, make the tahinia sauce. Combine tahinia, juice, olive oil, garlic, and salt in a blender and mix until smooth. With the motor running, add the water slowly until the sauce is the consistency of a thick paste.

When you're ready to cook, brush the kofta with a bit of olive oil. Place them on the barbecue or in a frying pan over medium-high heat for 2 to 3 minutes per side. Keep turning them every 2 minutes for about 10 minutes, until cooked through.

To assemble the sandwiches, cut open the kmaj, add some tahinia sauce, the kofta, mint leaves, and pickles. Mix the shatfeh and dilute it and drizzle on top. Enjoy!

SANDWICHES

4 kmaj (pita breads), halved

Fresh mint leaves

Sliced cucumber pickles

½ teaspoon Green Shatta

(page 76)

1½ teaspoons extra-virgin
olive oil

SERVES 4 TO 6



WINTER

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SQUASH CREAM SOUP WITH LABAN JAMEED

2 tablespoons extra-virgin
olive oil
1 butternut squash, about
1.5 kg / 3½ pounds
halved lengthwise and
seeded
1 tablespoon dried
zaatar leaves
Salt
¼ teaspoon ground
black pepper
¼ teaspoon ground
nutmeg
1 small onion, finely
chopped
3 garlic cloves, finely
chopped
720 ml / 3 cups vegetable
broth, plus more if
needed
30 g / 1 ounce laban

When temperatures drop, winter squash is in season in Palestine. The squash have fantastic flavor and are perfect for the relatively mild winters of Palestine and also so the taste has some sweetness to it. For this soup, we use the umami of the laban jameed (salted and dried yogurt) and the creamy, velvety texture of the roasted butternut squash and zaatar.

Preheat the oven to 220°C / 425°F.

Drizzle 1 teaspoon of the olive oil on the flesh of the squash and place in a well. Sprinkle the zaatar, 1 teaspoon salt, the remaining olive oil on both sides and rub in well. Place the squash in the oven for about 45 minutes, until the squash is soft, and caramelise.

In a large pot, heat the remaining 1 tablespoon of olive oil on medium heat and add a sprinkle of salt. Add the onion and cook for 5 minutes, or until the onion is coloured. Add the garlic and cook for 1 minute.

To finish the soup with a handheld blender, scoop the roasted squash into the pot. Add the broth and process until smooth. Add more broth if you find it's needed.

Ladle the soup into bowls and garnish with the laban jameed, parsley, and a splash of olive oil.

jameed (dried and
salted yoghurt, see

page 33)

½ bunch parsley, chopped

Olive oil

SERVES 6

ZNOUD EL SIT

SYRUP

200 g / 1 cup sugar
120 ml / ½ cup water
1 tablespoon fresh
lemon juice
1 teaspoon orange
blossom water
2 teaspoons rose water

QISHTA

500 ml / 2⅛ cups whole
milk
500 ml / 2⅛ cups heavy
cream

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120 g / ¾ cup plus^M
2 tablespoons cornflour
(cornstarch)
100 g / ½ cup sugar
1 tablespoon rose water

PASTRY

15 to 20 filo pastry sheets,
defrosted
120 g / ½ cup unsalted
butter, melted
Vegetable oil, for frying
50 g / ⅓ cup pistachios,
finely chopped
8 g / ¼ cup aromatic
organic rose petals

These rich filo pastries are filled with qishta (a cream soaked in an orange blossom syrup. Their name means “lady”, alluding to the shape of the pastry. This is often served either at the end of the meal or with a coffee to visitors any time of the day.

To prepare the syrup, combine the sugar, water, and lemon juice over medium heat. Stir constantly until the consistency thickens. Remove the pan from the heat, stir in the orange blossom water, then set aside to cool.

To prepare the qishta, combine the milk, cream, cornflour over medium heat. Whisk continuously, until everything comes to a boil. Qishta thickens, about 10 minutes. Remove from the heat and add the rose water. Cover with plastic wrap, pressing down so it doesn't form a skin. Cool in the fridge for 2 hours.

To assemble the pastries, take the stack of filo sheets and cut into four strips, each 10 cm / 4 inches wide. Cut a single piece of filo. Place on top of two stacked long filo strips, to form a cross.

Scoop 1½ tablespoons of the qishta on top of the filo, at the point where the filo sheets meet. Fold the sides of the shorter strip over the longer strip around it, to form a cigar shape. Roll tightly. Brush the formed log on all sides with melted butter and place on a sheet. Continue until all the filling is used.

Heat 2½ cm / 1 inch of oil in a frying pan to 180°C / 350°F. Place the pastries into a bowl and set it nearby.

Working in batches, fry the pastries on each side until crisp, about 4 minutes total. With tongs, plunge the pastries into the syrup. Arrange on a serving plate. Decorate with the pistachios and rose petals.

MAKES 14 PASTRIES

BURBARA

180 g / 1 cup wheat berries
720 ml / 3 cups water, plus
boiling water if needed
65 g / $\frac{1}{3}$ cup sugar
2 cinnamon sticks
1 teaspoon ground anise
1 teaspoon ground fennel
140 g / 1 cup chopped
mixed dried fruits
(apricots, raisins, and
so on)

TOPPINGS (OPTIONAL)

Walnuts, almonds, pine
nuts, and/or pistachios
Pomegranate seeds
Fennel candy and/or
candied chickpeas
Sugar-coated chickpeas
and/or almonds

In Palestine, the first weeks of December poking its nose in. We celebrate Eid al-Burbara, with a sweet pudding that perfumes the air of Bethlehem's winter.

Soak the wheat berries overnight in cold water.

Bring the 720 ml / 3 cups water to a boil in a pot, then reduce the heat to medium and add the wheat berries, sugar, and cinnamon sticks. Simmer for 15 minutes, stirring regularly so the berries don't stick to the bottom of the pot. Add the anise, fennel, and dried fruits and continue to simmer until the wheat berries are tender and fluffy. If the berries are tender, add up to 120 ml / $\frac{1}{2}$ cup boiling water.

Serve in small bowls and decorate with any or all of the toppings.

SERVES 6





CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS IN BETHLEHEM

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BETHLEHEM

Family gatherings for Christmas in Bethlehem always begin early in December with Burbara (page 205), a sweet, spiced wheat porridge-like dessert with truly love, made in honour of Saint Barbara. Eid al-Burbara, or Saint Barbara Day, is celebrated twice, as are many Christian holidays in Palestine: first on December 4 for Catholics and then on December 17, according to the old calendar used by the Greek Orthodox. Most extended Christian families here include members of different denominations.

The burbara frenzy begins at the spice shops where all the necessary ingredients are bought—the wheat, dried fruits and nuts, ground fennel and anise, and the candies often used as a decoration, along with bright red pomegranate seeds.

A joyous part of the ritual of burbara is that it is widely shared with helpings offered to neighbours and friends, regardless of their religious affiliations. Growing up, there were always invitations from different family members and friends we were close to throughout December. Different families prefer their own variations on the burbara recipe, and sampling these only enhanced the pleasure of the gatherings.

Eating burbara is also about sharing the intriguing tale of Saint Barbara. It is said that after Barbara converted to Christianity, her pagan father was enraged and ordered her to be captured, tortured, and beheaded. However, she hid in a wheat field where the crop grew to hide and protect her. These events are supposed to have happened in a Palestinian village north of Haifa called Aboud.

Another tradition associated with the holiday is to grow shoots of wheat from seeds and use these to decorate the Christmas nativity crèche.

After the resplendent Christmas lunch that was always served at my grandparents' home, the evening of the 24th of December necessitated a





meal to see us through the late-night Mass. That would tend to be a corn of a French and Palestinian buffet. Basically whoever was residing in Frar that time or had recently visited was obliged to return weighed down with Christmas essentials—as many French cheeses and as much charcuterie as could manage. Palestinian salads were also a must, as well as shawarma, and cold roast cuts and plenty of pickles and breads. So long as there we

children among us, Santa Claus would visit. Then we would tuck into more Teta Julia's delicious Christmas cake.

On the 25th itself, Christmas Day, it would fall to my parents to of magnificent spread to family and friends. My father delighted in orchest the drinks, paying special attention to the choices of wines, and the Chri: carols while my mother took care of the food. Turkey is not widely seen a traditional Christmas lunch by Palestinians, but sometimes we would opt huge bird as the main course. Otherwise, there would be more roast lamb often a generous ham, complementing my grandmother's choices from t before, served with another festive rice dish.

Desserts came in many forms, my father having a taste for a Christmas pudding and my Francophile mother responding with a bûche de Noël or perhaps her famous chocolate mousse. Then there would be a traditional Palestinian knafeh and ma'amoul, all detaining us for hours at the dining table. But this always gave us a chance to discuss how we would spend our time over the following days.

I try to emulate my mother's beautiful presentation of Christmas. She amassed a wonderful collection of festive hand-embroidered tablecoasters, napkins, and decorations made by her talented late friend Saman, who was another mother figure to me. I treasure some of her Christmas designs that have been passed on to me, so full of memories. She also set the gold standard in Christmas tree design, with different rooms decorated magically in coordinated colours.

My family has always been spread around the globe, so one Christmas treat would be having the time to catch up with those who were abroad for work or studies or were visiting from afar.

When I was young, Bethlehem did not feel as hemmed in as it does now. There was no tall grey concrete wall nor were there Israeli checkpoints. It was natural for us to go on Christmas outings to Jerusalem, just a few miles away. After all, my cousins and I went there every day for school. Going to the British Colony, a historic boutique hotel, gave the holiday a classic European feel. For years, the hotel had a Swiss chef who offered a traditional Western Christmas menu—complete with cranberry sauce. I remember he also made a delicious German barley and bacon soup and spicy cinnamon Swiss cookies. The highlight for us as children was the Christmas tree that was set up by the hotel in an area with a train made out of gingerbread and the complimentary cookies.

A trip to Jericho—an hour or so away by car—could be desirable because of its warmer climate. We would head to our family's favourite outdoor cafe, Al Rawda. In December, the weather is mild, and you can sit outdoors at wooden tables with an indulgent spread of Palestinian mezzeh (appetizers), grilled meats while sipping tart, sugary lemonade and refreshing ar

eating so many sugary cakes and biscuits over Christmas, it was always a contrast to be able to nibble on fresh fruits—the miniature bananas, mandarins, and tangerines that thrive in Jericho.

During the Christmas period other meals between feasts could be constructed from leftovers. My love for kmaj bread (pita) was only heightened by its usefulness as a pocket slathered with butter to savour cold meat and a smudge of mustard. Then, of course, thanks to the double hit of Christmas holidays in Bethlehem, the feasts would keep coming. No sooner would Catholic Christmas dates over than we would have yet more generous offers to special lunches and gatherings from our Orthodox family members.



QIDREH

MEAT

2 to 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
2 kg / 8¾ pounds bone-in lamb shoulder roast, cut in 2 cm / ¾-inch-thick slices of approximately 250 g / 9 ounces each
2 bay leaves
4 cardamom pods
1 cinnamon stick
1 onion, halved
1 tablespoon coarse sea salt
2 L / 2 quarts water

RICE AND CHICKPEAS

2½ tablespoons ghee or clarified butter
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
1 onion, finely chopped
10 to 12 peeled garlic cloves
1 teaspoon ground allspice
1 teaspoon ground turmeric
¼ teaspoon ground cumin
¼ teaspoon ground cardamom
¼ teaspoon ground coriander
¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg
500 g / 2½ cups medium-

This lamb and rice dish is the quintessential celebrations in Palestine. Many will send it off to the wood-fired oven, where in a copper pot to cook slowly, releasing the coating the rice with the richness of the lamb.

To prepare the meat, in a large pot, heat 2 tablespoons of oil over medium-high heat and brown the meat on all sides. You may have to work in batches, adding the additional oil as needed. Add the bay leaves, cardamom pods, cinnamon stick, onion, salt, the water and bring to a boil. Decrease the heat to a simmer until the meat is tender.

Transfer the meat to a plate, strain the broth into a large bowl and remove the solids.

To prepare the rice and chickpeas, in a large pot, heat 1 tablespoon of oil over medium heat. Add the onion and cook until softened. Add the garlic and sauté for 1 to 2 minutes. Add the cumin, cardamom, coriander, cinnamon, and nutmeg. Stir in the rice and chickpeas. Add 1 L / 4¼ cups of water and bring to a boil over high heat, then decrease the heat to a simmer.

Cover the pot and leave to cook until the broth is absorbed, about 15 minutes. Add the meat to the pot with the rice and cook for 10 minutes.

To prepare the garnish, in a small frying pan, heat 1 tablespoon of oil over medium heat. Add the almonds and toast for 3 minutes. Add the pine nuts and toast for 1 minute more, until golden.

Transfer the rice and meat to a serving tray and garnish with the almonds and pine nuts.

grain rice
250 g / 1½ cups dried
chickpeas, soaked
overnight and drained

GARNISH

½ teaspoon extra-virgin
olive oil
60 g / ½ cup slivered
almonds
60 g / ½ cup pine nuts

SERVES 6 TO 8





ROASTED PORK LEG

1 tablespoon coriander
seeds
1 tablespoon dried sage
2 teaspoons coarse sea salt
1 teaspoon dried rosemary
1 teaspoon dried zaatar
1 teaspoon freshly ground
black pepper
1 teaspoon ground cumin
240 ml / 1 cup extra-virgin
olive oil
2 whole garlic bulbs
1 bone-in pork leg, about
3 kg / 6½ pounds
4 onions

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BETHLEHEM

SERVES 8

With its large Christian population, Bethlehem has farms. In the beginning of the twentieth century, it was extremely expensive as a result of a disease affecting pigs. Therefore, many people started raising pigs at home to avoid the high prices of pork. However, in what became known as “the crisis of pigs”, the market was soon saturated and prices followed, leaving many people seriously out of pocket. Pork remains a popular part of our cuisine. I grew up with making a fantastic ham for Christmas, my father loved it. I can always tempt visitors with a roasted pork leg.

The night before you plan to roast the pork, make a rub. In a mortar, crush the coriander seeds, sage, salt, rosemary, zaatar, pepper, and black pepper with a pestle to crush and mix well. Add 120 ml / ½ cup of the olive oil with a paste.

Peel the cloves of one garlic bulb. Add to the mortar and

Spread some parchment paper on the work top and rub the paste on the pork. Cover the leg with the paper, put it on a baking sheet and leave overnight.

The next day, preheat the oven to its highest setting, usually 220°C / 425°F.

Pour the remaining 120 ml / ½ cup olive oil into a roasting pan. Add the remaining garlic bulb in half horizontally and the onions in half to the roasting pan. Lay the pork leg on top, fat-side up. Roast for 35 minutes, until the top is crackling.

Decrease the heat to 160°C / 325°F and roast for another 2 hours. The meat is done when it is falling apart. Remove the parchment paper and cover with aluminum foil.

Scrape all the juices and the fat into a small pot and heat until the juices have reduced by half. Off the heat, squeeze the garlic cloves out into the pot and use a hand blender to blend the

Place the pork leg on a board, and drizzle the sauce on to



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LAMB TESTICLES WITH SPICY TAHINIA

2 lamb testicles
1 tablespoon extra-virgin
olive oil
120 ml / ½ cup arak
Juice of half a lemon
1 tablespoon coarse
sea salt

SPICY TAHINIA SAUCE

2 tablespoons tahinia
2 tablespoons warm water
1 tablespoon fresh lemon
juice
1 garlic clove
½ red chilli pepper

SERVES 2

Traditionally, in Palestine, all parts of an animal are consumed. The way we consume meat today has changed, but the same cut of meat rather than celebrating what nature gives us. All the offal and little bits are cooked with different cooking methods, providing a variety of flavors. In Palestine, we grill offal. This recipe includes Arak, a high-alcohol anise-flavored spirit.

Ask the butcher to prepare the lamb testicles. With a small knife, cut the outside skin and remove the testicles in cold water for 15 to 20 minutes. Drain and cut in half lengthwise.

In a nonstick pan, heat the olive oil over medium heat and sauté for about 2 minutes per side. Carefully add the arak; the alcohol will ignite. Let it burn off, then add the lemon juice and salt. Make sure the meat has all gone white but it is still moist. Then it is ready to serve.

To prepare the spicy tahinia sauce, combine the tahini, garlic, and chilli pepper in a blender and process.

Serve the testicles with the sauce.

FALAFEL

160 g / 1 cup dried chickpeas, soaked in water to cover overnight and drained
20 g / 1/2 cup flat-leaf parsley, leaves and stems, finely chopped
20 g / 1/2 cup fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves and stems, finely chopped
1/2 onion
2 garlic cloves
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon ground coriander
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 tablespoon chickpea flour (optional)
Water (optional)
Vegetable oil, for frying

TO SERVE

Houmous Mutabal bil Tahinia (page 18)
Shawarma (page 126)
Tahinia Sauce (page 126)
Green Shatta (page 76)

MAKES 20 FALAFEL

Falafel is an essential Palestinian street food. You can find it at the corner of every street at every time of the day, offered by restaurants and by street vendors. Worldwide, it has become a snack par excellence.

The best falafel for me are made at Afteem's in Bethlehem that specializes in falafel, houmous, and musallata. The Salameh family, owners of Afteem, were expelled from their home by Israel. Having arrived in Bethlehem as refugees, they sought a livelihood and opened a little stall making falafel on the main Street. They quickly built a reputation for making the best falafel in town. Since then, the restaurant has grown into three branches. The secret to their success is both their recipes and their dedication to concentrate on making only a few key dishes they are known for.

I started making falafel during the pandemic lockdown there was no way to indulge in the delicious falafel of Afteem.

Grind the chickpeas in a food processor. Add the parsley, onion, garlic, cumin, ground coriander, salt, and baking soda. Process in a food processor and process until you have a consistency that is like wet sand but still a bit coarse.

Transfer the mixture to a bowl, cover, and refrigerate for 30 minutes.

If the mixture is too wet to form into patties, add the chickpea flour. If too dry to hold together, add a couple of teaspoons of water.

The best way to form the falafels is to use a falafel scoop you can find online. Alternatively, you can form them by hand. Form a ball of falafel mixture, then flatten them a bit so the sides are thick in the centre. Place on a baking sheet.

Heat a deep frying pan, pour about 8 cm / 3 inches of vegetable oil, and heat to 180°C / 350°F.

Working in batches, slide the falafel patties into the hot oil and fry for 2 minutes, until they turn golden on the outside and are cooked through.

Scoop them out with a spider or slotted spoon, and drain on a paper towel-lined plate.

Serve the falafel with houmous, shawarma, tahinia dip, a fresh salad, and pita bread.



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BUKJET RUZ

2 tablespoons extra-virgin
olive oil
1 onion, finely chopped
3 garlic cloves, crushed
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon ground black
pepper
¼ teaspoon ground
cinnamon
½ teaspoon ground
allspice
¼ teaspoon ground
nutmeg
¼ teaspoon ground
cardamom
500 g / 18 ounces lamb,
cut in cubes
400 g / 2 cups long-
grain rice
250 g / 2 cups fresh green
peas (or substitute
frozen peas)
830 to 950 ml / 3½ to
4 cups water
1 tablespoon unsalted
butter, melted
A pack filo pastry sheets
60 g / ½ cup almond
slivers

The Arabic word *bukja* means “parcel” it is also used for food parcels. The use of common in my Teta Julia’s kitchen. She used rounded bukjas filled with rice, peas, and them open to let the steam come out with We always had them with yoghurt on the

Heat 1 tablespoon of the olive oil in a large pot the onion and sauté for 4 to 5 minutes, until tender salt, pepper, cinnamon, allspice, nutmeg, and cardamom swirl to release their aroma. Add the lamb cubes 10 minutes, until they’re coloured on all sides and

Meanwhile, soak the rice in water to cover for 30 minutes with water a few times until the water runs clear to the meat. Add enough of the water to cover the rice of salt.

Bring to a boil, then decrease the heat to low, until all of the water is absorbed and the rice is tender

Take the pot off the heat, keep it covered, and let it rest for 10 minutes

Pour the contents of the pot onto a large tray, and use a fork to allow it to cool down all the way

Preheat the oven to 180°C / 350°F. Combine the cooled rice mixture with the remaining 1 tablespoon olive oil in a small bowl with some of the butter/oil mixture.

Cut the filo pastry sheets to be long enough to cover the filling. Line the bowl with three to four layers brush each sheet lightly with the butter/oil mixture cooled rice mixture, leaving a bit of space at the top cover the rice with the three or four layers and

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

Flip the bowl onto the sheet to dislodge the bul
6 to 8 bukjas. Brush them again once they are a

SERVES 6 TO 8

Bake for about 30 minutes, until the dough is





CHRISTMAS EVE

WITH TETA JULIA

While Christmas is an annual highlight for many people around the world, naturally in Bethlehem, it is something extra special. It can feel like the life in the town is always building up to this holiday. But these days, someone important is missing: my grandmother. Teta Julia truly loved Christmas, an occasion when she did so many things that she cared deeply about: flavoursome food, generous hospitality, charitable giving, the preservation of traditions, and, of course, family get-togethers.

My grandmother Julia was the principal inspiration for my passion for cooking as a boy. I spent a lot of time at her house, absorbing her busy daily routine. There would always be enticing smells and a frenzy of activity in the kitchen as meals were prepared, often for guests. Meanwhile, farmers would come directly at the front door to offer their seasonal specialities: ripe prickly pears (watermelons) from Jenin, fat courgettes (zucchini), and finger-length aubergines (eggplant) from Battir.

The days started early, and often by 10 in the morning, my grandmother would be patiently waiting on the terrace for a friend to attend an event at the Arab Women's Union, where she was one of the founders. To my delight, visitors coming to see her from neighbouring villages would often bear tasty gifts: grape molasses (dibs) from Khirbet Beit Zakariyyah or honey from Ubeid. Or salty laban jameed (salted and dried yoghurt) from local Bedouin communities.

As Christmas approached, my grandparents' home would bustle with

with energy. My grandmother had been raised in a home where Christmas traditions were hugely important. They had been ingrained in her by her great-grandfather, Mattia Kattan, whom she described compellingly in her book, *Lest We Forget*. Sadly, he died before I was born, but I appreciate he was the well-travelled, multilingual son of a former mayor of Bethlehem, a merchant with shops in Amman, Haifa, and Jerusalem, who was dedicated to his large family. He was the loving father of eight girls—an accomplished family which included both my grandmothers—and one boy.

My grandmother took huge pride in our city and always strove to share its stories and memories for locals as well as its many international visitors.

can clearly be seen in the Beituna al-Talhami Museum which was established by the Arab Women's Union under her administration and through her of community work. Long before December 24, Christmas Eve for our family, she and her friends would be knitting sweaters to be sent as gifts to Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli jails. There were always fund-raising activities and Christmas parties for the less well-off in the community to organise, too.

My grandmother instilled in all her grandchildren the values of charity and philanthropy. My siblings, cousins, and I were always encouraged to help those less fortunate than ourselves, particularly in the run-up to Christmas. We would make small donations from our pocket money to local charities, such as the orphanages, so that the children cared for there could have a Christmas and a festive meal.

Our family's Christmas preparations have always begun in early December 1, the start of Advent, which also happens to be my birthday. On Christmas trees and decorations are on display, Christmas carols are legitimately played, and stacks of Julia's rich Christmas cake start being baked. Funnily enough, the recipe for the cake was simply based on an old one, which Teta adapted to include locally sourced Palestinian ingredients, adding extra cinnamon and nutmeg, moist dates, fleshy dried apricots. Throughout December, Teta's home would be filled with this Christmas cake. Her oven was on nonstop—and the kitchen was converted into a mini assembly line for her cakes.

I have no idea how many Christmas cakes Teta would make each year, but it was a lot. Most were devoured or handed out to loved ones just before Christmas. My main task as an enthusiastic young kitchen assistant was to chop the dried fruit and then coat the pieces in flour before adding them to the mix so they did not just slump down to the bottom of the baking tin. I would also be trusted to lay out all the long rectangular cake pans with parchment paper while my grandmother and her regular kitchen

the cake mix ready. Finally, as the cakes slowly baked, we would sit in the kitchen, keeping an eye on them. When my grandfather came to work, the irresistible aroma would always put a smile on his face.

Nowadays, the Israeli state's construction of the segregation marred one of the main highlights of Christmas celebrations—the procession of church officials from Jerusalem's Old City to the Nativity Church in Bethlehem. But when I was growing up, large crowds of joyful Christians, mostly from Bethlehem and the surrounding areas, would gather along the route of the procession, with the first clusters at Mar Elias Monastery, on the edge of the city, and at Rachel's Tomb, where many notables would



my grandparents' house was well located along the route inside Bethlehem where the people would congregate there in the front garden on December 24 to greet the Catholic patriarch who heads the convoy and watch the scouts and horsemen who accompanied him. My grandparents—who had close relations with the clergy—were always ready to salute the patriarch of the day. After he had passed, we went inside for a grand lunch.

In the weeks leading up to this event, the conversation would revolve

around whom to invite to the lunch. My grandmother, the generous host hated to leave anyone out and always secretly invited extra guests. She would also welcome those who had not been invited as we packed inside. By noon an exquisitely decorated Christmas tree would be ready with gifts wrapped for everyone so that for us children, this was always an exhilarating time. During the extensive conversations among the family about what our lunch should include the menu was usually more or less the same.

The appetisers were invariably sfiha (meat-filled flatbreads), sambusak (crispy meat pies), kibbeh (spiced meat and bulgur wheat), and a local sal

Then my grandmother would make what she called “Oriental rice”, lavished minced meat (ground meat), festive grilled chestnuts, almonds. This would accompany roasted turkey and a roasted lamb shank as her famous glazed carrots. Some years, she would opt for a whole lamb stuffed with rice and meat. It was always an epic meal. On the many of my relatives would shy away from the head of the lamb, but would cut this and quietly serve it to those of us privileged to know of the delicacy and sometimes to others who had no idea what it was. I contentedly tuck into the brain meat, bone marrow, and any other part of the lamb, leaving others to enjoy the leaner but, in my opinion, less tasty part.

I am eternally grateful that I had such exceptional grandparents. I was able to spend so much time with Teta Julia. She taught me about Palestinian spice and herb, and most importantly, about Palestinian culture, the love of Bethlehem, and the importance of resilience.

Teta’s Christmas lunches, her *pièces de résistances*, would always start with her Christmas cake. We were only allowed to taste it for the first time on Christmas Eve. There was a ritual in which she took a cake out of the freezer where it would have been stored for three weeks, for us to slice it to taste. It was so much anticipation, that first taste was always a memorable moment.

After Teta Julia passed away, the entire family was in denial, Christmas time was the hardest, the time when her absence was most felt. It took me several years to realise that I could bake her Christmas cake with the family in her memory, as a tribute to her.

A glorious Christmas Eve lunch would taper off rather than end. We would sit around, our stomachs full, sipping Arabic coffee, and our conversation would begin to shift to midnight Mass. While much of the family was heading to the Nativity Church, the scramble for the sought-after tickets had often begun in the autumn, was off-putting for my grandmother. Along with my grandfather and parents, she preferred to head to the Bethlehem University, another eminent local institution which she had helped to found.

TETA JULIA'S CHRISTMAS CAKE

4 whole eggs
200 g / 1 cup sugar
240 ml / 1 cup
vegetable oil
170 g / ½ cup dabs (grape
molasses)
240 ml / 1 cup orange juice
420 g / 3½ cups all-
purpose flour
2 teaspoons ground
cinnamon
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon ground nutmeg
1 teaspoon ground allspice
1 teaspoon ground ginger
1 teaspoon ground
cardamom
480 g / 2 cups dates,
pitted and quartered
280 g / 2 cups raisins
100 g / 1 cup walnut pieces
90 g / ½ cup dried
apricots, halved

Beginning December 1, my grandparents' house was filled with the aroma of Christmas cake, my grandmother's adapted fruitcake recipe that includes her personal Palestinian twist.

This cake symbolizes Christmas for all of us in the diaspora. Julia would share the love and fill up all our refrigerators.

After her passing, it was a while before I had the chance to perform the ritual. Now, not a Christmas passes by without making this cake.

Preheat the oven to 150°C / 300°F. Line a 23 by 13 cm / 9 by 5 in pan with aluminum foil, making sure the foil overhangs the edges. Line the foil with parchment paper, making sure the parchment covers the edges.

In a large mixing bowl, beat the eggs with the sugar until thick. Add the molasses. Add the orange juice.

In a separate bowl, whisk together 280 g / 2 cups of the 1 cup flour, baking powder, salt, nutmeg, allspice, ginger, and cardamom. Add the remaining ingredients to the wet and mix gently until you have a smooth batter.

In another bowl, combine the dates, raisins, walnuts, apricots, and cherries with the remaining 140 g / 1 cup flour. Toss to coat.

Put the dried fruit mixture in the prepared pan and pour the batter over it. Allow the batter to sink in well around the mixture.

Bake, uncovered, for 1 hour. Check the cake with a toothpick. If it comes out clean, fold the parchment paper around the cake and continue baking for 30 minutes.

Place the pan on a wire rack to cool completely. Wrap the cake in the parchment and foil and store in the refrigerator for at least a week before enjoying it.

80 g / ½ cup dried
figs, halved
70 g / ½ cup dried
cherries

YIELDS 1 LOAF CAKE







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share our hospitality with the world.



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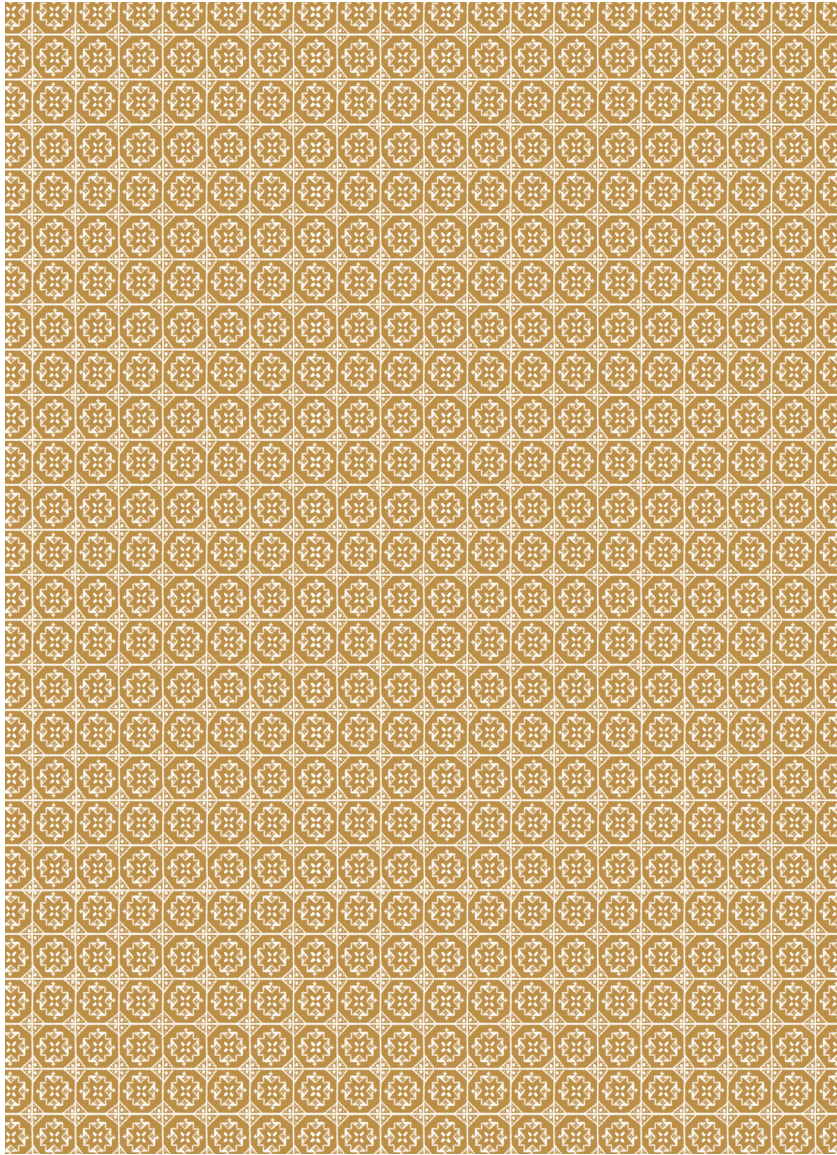
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Fadi Kattan is a Franco-Palestinian chef living in Bethlehem. He discovered his love of cooking in his late grandmother's and mother's kitchen, where he later trained in Paris. Fadi's cuisine combines global influences, a dedication to perfection and a passion for the local terroir. He has two restaurants: one in Bethlehem, and Akub, in London, as well as a YouTube series where he shares Palestinian grandmothers and their food knowledge and traditions.

